Rizpah

Wailing, wailing, wailing, the wind over land and sea—
And Willy's voice in the wind, "O mother, come out to me!"
Why should he call me tonight, when he knows that I cannot go?
For the downs are as bright as day, and the full moon stares
at the snow.

We should be seen, my dear; they would spy us out of the town.
The loud black nights for us, and the storm rushing over the down,
When I cannot see my own hand, but am led by the creak of the
chain,
And grovel and grope for my son till I find myself drenched with
the rain.

Anything fallen again? nay—what was there left to fall?
I have taken them home, I have numbered the bones, I have
hidden them all.
What am I saying? and what are you? do you come as a spy?
Falls? what falls? who knows? As the tree falls so must it lie.

Who let her in? how long has she been? you—what have
you heard?
Why did you sit so quiet? you never have spoken a word.
O—to pray with me—yes—a lady—none of their spies—
But the night has crept into my heart, and begun to darken
my eyes.

Ah—you, that have lived so soft, what should you know of
the night,
The blast and the burning shame and the bitter frost and the
fright?
I have done it, while you were asleep—you were only made for
the day.
I have gathered my baby together—and now you may go your way.

Nay—for it's kind of you, madam, to sit by an old dying wife.
But say nothing hard of my boy, I have only an hour of life.

1. See II Samuel xxi.8–11 for the story of Rizpah, a mother who kept guard over the bones of her sons who
had been hanged.
I kissed my boy in the prison, before he went out to die.  
“They dared me to do it,” he said, and he never has told me a lie.  
I whipped him for robbing an orchard once when he was but a child—  
“The farmer dared me to do it,” he said; he was always so wild—  
And idle—and couldn’t be idle—my Willy—he never could rest.  
The King should have made him a soldier, he would have been one of his best.

But he lived with a lot of wild mates, and they never would let him be good;  
They swore that he dare not rob the mail, and he swore that he would;  
And he took no life, but he took one purse, and when all was done  
He flung it among his fellows—“I’ll none of it,” said my son.

I came into court to the judge and the lawyers. I told them my tale,  
God’s own truth—but they killed him, they killed him for robbing the mail.  
They hanged him in chains for a show—we had always borne a good name—  
To be hanged for a thief—and then put away—isn’t that enough shame?  
Dust to dust—low down—let us hide! but they set him so high  
That all the ships of the world could stare at him, passing by.  
God’ll pardon the hell-black raven and horrible fowls of the air,  
But not the black heart of the lawyer who killed him and hanged him there.

And the jailer forced me away. I had bid him my last good-bye;  
They had fastened the door of his cell. “O mother!” I heard him cry.  
I couldn’t get back though I tried, he had something further to say,  
And now I never shall know it. The jailer forced me away.

Then since I couldn’t but hear that cry of my boy that was dead,  
They seized me and shut me up: they fastened me down on my bed.  
“Mother, O mother!”—he called in the dark to me year after year—  
They beat me for that, they beat me—you know that I couldn’t but hear;  
And then at the last they found I had grown so stupid and still  
They let me abroad again—but the creatures had worked their will.

Flesh of my flesh was gone, but bone of my bone was left—  
I stole them all from the lawyers—and you, will you call it a theft?—  
My baby, the bones that had sucked me, the bones that had laughed and had cried—  
Their? O, no! they are mine—not theirs—they had moved in my side.
Do you think I was scared by the bones? I kissed 'em, I buried 'em all—
I can't dig deep, I am old—in the night by the churchyard wall.
My Willy 'ill rise up whole when the trumpet of judgment 'ill sound,
But I charge you never to say that I laid him in holy ground.

They would scratch him up—they would hang him again on the cursed tree.

Sin? O, yes, we are sinners, I know—let all that be,
And read me a Bible verse of the Lord's goodwill toward men—
"Full of compassion and mercy, the Lord"—let me hear it again;
"Full of compassion and mercy—long-suffering." Yes, O, yes!
For the lawyer is born but to murder—the Saviour lives but to bless.

He'll never put on the black cap except for the worst of the worst,
And the first may be last—I have heard it in church—and the last may be first.
Suffering—O, long-suffering—yes, as the Lord must know,
Year after year in the mist and the wind and the shower and the snow.

Heard, have you? what? they have told you he never repented his sin.

How do they know it? are they his mother? are you of his kin?
Heard! have you ever heard, when the storm on the downs began,
The wind that 'ill wail like a child and the sea that 'ill moan like a man?

Election, Election, and Reprobation—it's all very well.
But I go tonight to my boy, and I shall not find him in hell.
For I cared so much for my boy that the Lord has looked into my care,
And He means me I'm sure to be happy with Willy, I know not where.

And if he be lost—but to save my soul, that is all your desire—
Do you think that I care for my soul if my boy be gone to the fire?
I have been with God in the dark—go, go, you may leave me alone—

You never have borne a child—you are just as hard as a stone.

Madam, I beg your pardon! I think that you mean to be kind,
But I cannot hear what you say for my Willy's voice in the wind—
The snow and the sky so bright—he used to call in the dark,
And he calls to me now from the church and not from the gibbet—for hark!

Nay—you can hear it yourself—it is coming—shaking the walls—
Willy—the moon’s in a cloud——Good-night. I am going. He calls.

1880

_In Love, If Love Be Love_¹

In love, if love be Love, if love be ours,
Faith and unfaith can ne’er be equal powers:
Unfaith in aught is want of faith in all.

It is the little rift² within the lute,
That by and by will make the music mute,
And ever widening slowly silence all.

The little rift within the lover’s lute
Or little pitted speck in garnered fruit,
That rotting inward slowly molders all.

It is not worth the keeping: let it go:
But shall it? answer, darling, answer, no.
And trust me not at all or all in all.

To E. FitzGerald¹

Old Fitz, who from your suburb grange,
Where once I tarried for a while,
Glance at the wheeling orb of change,
And greet it with a kindly smile;

Whom yet I see as there you sit
Beneath your sheltering garden-tree,
And watch your doves about you flit,
And plant on shoulder, hand, and knee,
Or on your head their rosy feet,
As if they knew your diet spares
Whatever moved in that full sheet
Let down to Peter at his prayers;²
Who live on milk and meal and grass;
And once for ten long weeks I tried

Your table of Pythagoras,³
And seemed at first “a thing enskied,”

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1. Sung by Vivien in her successful attempt to seduce Merlin, the magician (Idylls VI.385 ff.).
2. Crack.
3. Greek philosopher and vegetarian. FitzGerald made several unsuccessful attempts to regulate Tennyson’s eating habits as well as to diminish his daily consumption of a pint of port wine and vast quantities of pipe tobacco.
As Shakespeare has it, airy-light  
To float above the ways of men,  
Then fell from that half-spiritual height  
Chilled, till I tasted flesh again  
One night when earth was winter-black,  
And all the heavens flashed in frost;  
And on me, half-asleep, came back  
That wholesome heat the blood had lost,  
And set me climbing icy capes  
And glaciers, over which there rolled  
To meet me long-armed vines with grapes  
Of Eshcol hugeness; for the cold  
Without, and warmth within me, wrought  
To mold the dream; but none can say  
That Lenten fare makes Lenten thought  
Who reads your golden Eastern lay,  
Than which I know no version done  
In English more divinely well;  
A planet equal to the sun  
Which cast it, that large infidel  
Your Omar; and your Omar drew  
Full-handed plaudits from our best  
In modern letters, and from two,  
Old friends outvaluing all the rest,  
Two voices heard on earth no more;  
But we old friends are still alive,  
And I am nearing seventy-four,  
While you have touched at seventy-five,  
And so I send a birthday line  
Of greeting; and my son, who dipped  
In some forgotten book of mine  
With sallow scraps of manuscript,  
And dating many a year ago,  
Has hit on this, which you will take,  
My Fitz, and welcome, as I know,  
Less for its own than for the sake  
Of one recalling gracious times,  
When, in our younger London days,  
You found some merit in my rhymes,  
And I more pleasure in your praise.
Wandered back to living boyhood while I heard the curlews call,
I myself so close on death, and death itself in Locksley Hall.

So—your happy suit was blasted—she the faultless, the divine;
And you liken—boyish babble—this boy-love of yours with mine.

I myself have often babbled doubtless of a foolish past;
Babble, babble; our old England may go down in babble at last.

“Curse him!” curse your fellow-victim? call him dotard in your rage?
Eyes that lured a doting boyhood well might fool a dotard’s age.

Jilted for a wealthier! wealthier? yet perhaps she was not wise;
I remember how you kissed the miniature with those sweet eyes.

In the hall there hangs a painting—Amy’s arms about my neck—
Happy children in a sunbeam sitting on the ribs of wreck.

In my life there was a picture, she that clasped my neck had flown;
I was left within the shadow sitting on the wreck alone.

Yours has been a slighter ailment, will you sicken for her sake?
You, not you! your modern amorist is of easier, earthlier make.

Amy loved me, Amy failed me, Amy was a timid child;
But your Judith—but your worldling—she had never driven me wild.

She that holds the diamond necklace dearer than the golden ring,
She that finds a winter sunset² fairer than a morn of spring.

She that in her heart is brooding on his briefer lease of life,
While she vows “till death shall part us,” she the would-be-widow wife.

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young man in the original *Locksley Hall* (published in 1842 but presumably set in 1826). Although the speaker’s tone has remained the same during the 60 years that have passed, his attitudes towards progress, immortality, and democracy have changed considerably. Also changed is his view of the Squire of Locksley Hall, who has just died—the feudal past as represented by his former rival for the hand of his cousin Amy.

Tennyson told his son that later generations of readers might find that the two poems were his “most historically interesting” productions, in their descriptions of his century at two different points in its development.

2. The elderly man whom Judith chose to marry.
She the worldling born of worldlings—father, mother—be content,
Even the homely farm can teach us there is something in descent.

Yonder in that chapel, slowly sinking now into the ground,
Lies the warrior, my forefather, with his feet upon the hound.

Crossed! for once he sailed the sea to crush the Moslem in his pride;
Dead the warrior, dead his glory, dead the cause in which he died.

Yet how often I and Amy in the moldering aisle have stood,
Gazing for one pensive moment on that founder of our blood.

There again I stood today, and where of old we knelt in prayer,
Close beneath the casement crimson with the shield of Locksley—there,

All in white Italian marble, looking still as if she smiled,
Lies my Amy dead in childbirth, dead the mother, dead the child.

Dead—and sixty years ago, and dead her aged husband now—
I, this old white-headed dreamer, stoop and kissed her marble brow.

Gone the fires of youth, the follies, furies, curses, passionate tears,
Gone like fires and floods and earthquakes of the planet's dawning years.

Fires that shook me once, but now to silent ashes fallen away.
Cold upon the dead volcano sleeps the gleam of dying day.

Gone the tyrant of my youth, and mute below the chancel stones,
All his virtues—I forgive them—black in white above his bones.

Gone the comrades of my bivouac, some in fight against the foe,
Some through age and slow diseases, gone as all on earth will go.

Gone with whom for forty years my life in golden sequence ran,
She with all the charm of woman, she with all the breadth of man,

Strong in will and rich in wisdom, Edith, yet so lowly-sweet,
Woman to her inmost heart, and woman to her tender feet,

3. The crossed feet of the statue on top of the tomb indicate that the speaker's ancestor had served in the Crusades.
4. A “selfish uncle” who became his guardian after the death of his father. See Locksley Hall, line 156.
5. I.e., black-lettered inscription carved on a slab of white marble set into the floor of the church.
Very woman of very woman, nurse of ailing body and mind,
She that linked again the broken chain that bound me
to my kind.

Here today was Amy with me, while I wandered down the
coast,
Near us Edith’s holy shadow, smiling at the slighter ghost.

Gone our sailor son thy father, Leonard early lost at sea;
Thou alone, my boy, of Amy’s kin and mine are left to me.

Gone thy tender-natured mother, wearying to be left alone,
Pining for the stronger heart that once had beat beside her own.

Truth, for truth is truth, he worshiped, being true as he was brave;
Good, for good is good, he followed, yet he looked beyond the grave.⁶

Wiser there than you, that crowning barren Death as lord of all,
Deem this over-tragic drama’s closing curtain is the pall!

Beautiful was death in him, who saw the death, but kept the deck,
Saving women and their babes, and sinking with the sinking wreck,

Gone forever! Ever? no—for since our dying race began,
Ever, ever, and forever was the leading light of man.

Those that in barbarian burials killed the slave, and slew the wife
Felt within themselves the sacred passion of the second life.

Indian warriors dream of ampler hunting grounds beyond the night;
Even the black Australian dying hopes he shall return, a white.

Truth for truth, and good for good! The good, the true, the pure, the just—
Take the charm “Forever” from them, and they crumble into dust.

Gone the cry of “Forward, Forward,” lost within a growing gloom;
Lost, or only heard in silence from the silence of a tomb.

Half the marvels of my morning, triumphs over time and space,
Staled by frequence, shrunk by usage into commonest commonplace!

“Forward” rang the voices then, and of the many mine was one.
Let us hush this cry of “Forward” till ten thousand years have gone.

⁶ These lines were written in April, 1886, after Tennyson received news of the death of his 32-year-old son, Lionel, who had been returning from India to England.
Far among the vanished races, old Assyrian kings would flay
80 Captives whom they caught in battle—iron-hearted victors they.

Ages after, while in Asia, he that led the wile Moguls
Timur built his ghastly tower of eighty thousand human skulls, 7

Then, and here in Edward's time, an age of noblest English
names,
Christian conquerors took and flung the conquered Christian
into flames. 8

Love your enemy, bless your haters, said the Greatest of the
great;
Christian love among the Churches looked the twin of
heathen hate.

From the golden alms of Blessing man had coined himself
a curse:
Rome of Caesar, Rome of Peter, which was crueler? which
was worse?

France had shown a light to all men, preached a Gospel, all
men's good;
90 Celtic Demos 9 rose a Demon, shrieked and slaked the light
with blood.

Hope was ever on her mountain, watching till the day
begun—
Crowned with sunlight—over darkness—from the still
unrisen sun.

Have we grown at last beyond the passions of the primal clan?
“Kill your enemy, for you hate him,” still, “your enemy” was
a man.

Have we sunk below them? peasants maim the helpless
horse, and drive
Innocent cattle under thatch, and burn the kindlier brutes
alive. 1

Brutes, the brutes are not your wrongers—burnt at midnight,
found at morn,
Twisted hard in mortal agony with their offspring, born-unborn,

Clinging to the silent mother! Are we devils? are we men?
Sweet Saint Francis of Assisi, would that he were here again, 2

7. Timur or Tamerlane (1336–1405), Mogul ruler
whose conquests included the Persian City, Isfa-
han, where the skulls of thousands of the slaugh-
tered inhabitants were piled up.
8. In the reign of Edward VI (1547–53), Catholics
were persecuted; in the reign of Mary (1553–58),
Protestants were persecuted.
9. I.e., the common people; here, the reference is
to the mass executions and slaughterings during
the French Revolution.
1. In the 1880's, peasants agitating against land-
lords in Ireland destroyed cattle and farm buildings.
2. St. Francis (1182–1226), whose fondness for
animals and birds was noteworthy.
He that in his Catholic wholeness used to call the very flowers
Sisters, brothers—and the beasts—whose pains are hardly
less than ours!

Chaos, Cosmos! Cosmos, Chaos! who can tell how all will end?
Read the wide world’s annals, you, and take their wisdom for
your friend.

Hope the best, but hold the Present fatal daughter of the Past,
Shape your heart to front the hour, but dream not that the
hour will last.

Aye, if dynamite and revolver leave you courage to be wise—
When was age so crammed with menace? madness? written,
spoken lies?

Envy wears the mask of Love, and, laughing sober fact to
scorn,
Cries to weakest as to strongest, “Ye are equals, equal-born.”

Equal-born? O, yes, if yonder hill be level with the flat.
Charm us, orator, till the lion look no larger than the cat,
Till the cat through that mirage of overheated language loom
Larger than the lion—Demos end in working its own doom.

Russia bursts our Indian barrier, shall we fight her? shall
we yield?
Pause! before you sound the trumpet, hear the voices from
the field.

Those three hundred millions under one Imperial scepter now,
Shall we hold them? shall we loose them? take the suffrage
of the plow.

Nay, but these would feel and follow Truth if only you and you,
Rivals of realm-ruining party, when you speak were wholly true.

Plowmen, shepherds, have I found, and more than once, and
still could find,
Sons of God, and kings of men in utter nobleness of mind,
Truthful, trustful, looking upward to the practiced hustings-liar;
So the higher wields the lower, while the lower is the higher.

3. Bombings and shootings, as in the Anarchist
Riot in Haymarket Square, Chicago, May 4, 1886.
4. The British regarded Afghanistan as a buffer
between Russia and India; in 1885 a Russian
attack against an Afghan border force (an incident
known as the Panjdeh scare) brought Britain and
Russia to the brink of war.
5. I.e., let the farm laborers’ vote decide whether
Britain should try to hold India as part of Queen Vic-
toria’s Empire (which it had become in 1877) or to
withdraw and let the 300 million people of India con-
front the threat of Russian invasion on their own.
6. Farm laborers, to whom Parliament granted the
right to vote in 1884. As a member of the House of
Lords Tennyson himself had voted for this measure
but with considerable reluctance because it seemed
to him premature.
7. I.e., a lying politician making a campaign speech
on a platform.
Here and there a cotter’s babe is royal-born by right divine;
Here and there my lord is lower than his oxen or his swine.

Chaos, Cosmos! Cosmos, Chaos! once again the sickening
game;
Freedom, free to slay herself, and dying while they shout her name.

Step by step we gained a freedom known to Europe, known
to all;
Step by step we rose to greatness—through the tonguesters
we may fall.

You that woo the Voices—a—tell them “old experience is a fool,”
Teach your flattered kings that only those who cannot read can rule.

Pluck the mighty from their seat, but set no meek ones in
their place;
Pillory Wisdom in your markets, pelt your offal at her face.

Tumble Nature heel o’er head, and, yelling with the yelling
street,
Set the feet above the brain and swear the brain is in the feet.

Bring the old dark ages back without the faith, without
the hope,
Break the State, the Church, the Throne, and roll their ruins
down the slope.

Authors—essayist, atheist, novelist, realist, rhymester, play
your part,
Paint the mortal shame of nature with the living hues of art.

Rip your brothers’ vices open, strip your own foul passions bare;
Down with Reticence, down with Reverence—forward—naked—let them stare.

Feed the budding rose of boyhood with the drainage of your
sewer;
Send the drain into the fountain, lest the stream should issue pure.

Set the maiden fancies wallowing in the troughs of Zolaism—a—
Forward, forward, aye, and backward, downward too into the abysm!

8. Votes.
9. When translations of the novels of Emile Zola (1840–1902) began appearing in England in 1884 his publisher was prosecuted and a violent controversy ensued. Zola’s emphasis on the animal nature of his characters and his frank treatment of their sexual lives (especially those of the working classes) appealed to the younger generation of English writers but seemed shockingly distasteful to some of Tennyson’s contemporaries.
Do your best to charm the worst, to lower the rising race
of men;
Have we risen from out the beast, then back into the beast
again?

Only “dust to dust” for me that sicken at your lawless din,
Dust in wholesome old-world dust before the newer world
150 begin.

Heated am I? you—you wonder—well, it scarce becomes
mine age—
Patience! let the dying actor mouth his last upon the stage.

Cries of unprogressive dotage ere the dotard fall asleep?
Noises of a current narrowing, not the music of a deep?

Aye, for doubtless I am old, and think gray thoughts, for I
am gray;
After all the stormy changes shall we find a changeless May?

After madness, after massacre, Jacobinism and Jacquerie,¹
Some diviner force to guide us through the days I shall
not see?

When the schemes and all the systems, kingdoms and
155 republics fall,
Something kindlier, higher, holier—all for each and each
for all?

All the full-brain, half-brain races, led by Justice, Love,
and Truth;
All the millions one at length, with all the visions of my youth?

All diseases quenched by Science, no man halt, or deaf
or blind;
Stronger ever born of weaker, lustier body, larger mind?

160 Earth at last a warless world, a single race, a single tongue—
I have seen her far away—for is not Earth as yet so young?—

Every tiger madness muzzled, every serpent passion killed,
Every grim ravine a garden, every blazing desert tilled,

Robed in universal harvest up to either pole she smiles,
Universal ocean softly washing all her warless isles.

Warless? when her tens are thousands, and her thousands
millions, then—
All her harvest all too narrow—who can fancy warless men?

¹ The Jacobins were an extremist Revolutionary party in France; a “Jacquerie” is an uprising of peasants against landholders, the name being derived from a peasants’ revolt against the nobles of Northern France in 1358.
Warless? war will die out late then. Will it ever? late or soon?
Can it, till this outworn earth be dead as you dead world the moon?

Dead the new astronomy calls her.—On this day and at this hour,
In this gap between the sandhills, whence you see the Locksley tower,

Here we met, our latest meeting—Amy—sixty years ago—
She and I—the moon was falling greenish through a rosy glow,

Just above the gateway tower, and even where you see her now—
Here we stood and clasped each other, swore the
seeming-deathless vow.—

Dead, but how her living glory lights the hall, the dune, the grass!
Yet the moonlight is the sunlight, and the sun himself will pass.

Venus near her! smiling downward at this earthlier earth of ours,
Closer on the sun, perhaps a world of never fading flowers.²

Hesper, whom the poet called the Bringer home of all good things³—
All good things may move in Hesper, perfect peoples, perfect kings.

Hesper—Venus—were we native to that splendor or in Mars,
We should see the globe we groan in, fairest of their evening stars.

Could we dream of wars and carnage, craft and madness, lust and spite,

Roaring London, raving Paris, in that point of peaceful light?

Might we not in glancing heavenward on a star so silver-fair,
Yearn, and clasp the hands and murmur, “Would to God that we were there”?

Forward, backward, backward, forward, in the
immeasurable sea,
Swayed by vaster ebbs and flows than can be known to you or me.

All the suns—are these but symbols of innumerable man,
Man or Mind that sees a shadow of the planner or the plan?

². The evening star, being closer to the sun, may be a more perfect planet than ours, but as the speaker also speculates (line 192), its beautiful appearance may be deceptive and life there be troubled by war and other evils as is life on earth.
³. Hesper or Venus, was addressed by the Greek poet Sappho “Oh, Hesperus! Thou bringest all things home.” Cf. The Waste Land, line 221-222 and see also In Memoriam, sec. 121.
Is there evil but on earth? or pain in every peopled sphere?
Well, be grateful for the sounding watchword “Evolution” here,
Evolution ever climbing after some ideal good,
And Reversion ever dragging Evolution in the mud.

What are men that He should heed us? cried the king of sacred song;  4
Insects of an hour, that hourly work their brother insect wrong,
While the silent heavens roll, and suns along their fiery way,
All their planets whirling round them, flash a million miles a day.

Many an aeon moulded earth before her highest, man,
was born,
Many an aeon too may pass when earth is manless and forlorn,
Earth so huge, and yet so bounded—pools of salt, and plots of land—
Shallow skin of green and azure—chains of mountain, grains of sand!

Only That which made us meant us to be mightier by and by,
Set the sphere of all the boundless heavens within the human eye,
Sent the shadow of Himself, the boundless, through the human soul;
Boundless inward in the atom, boundless outward in the Whole.

Here is Locksley Hall, my grandson, here the lion-guarded gate.
Not tonight in Locksley Hall—tomorrow—you, you come so late.

Wrecked—your train—or all but wrecked? a shattered wheel?
a vicious boy!
Good, this forward,  5 you that preach it, is it well to wish you joy?

Is it well that while we range with Science, glorying in the Time,
City children soak and blacken soul and sense in city slime?

There among the glooming alleys Progress halts on palsied feet,
Crime and hunger cast our maidens by the thousand on the street.

4. King David. See Psalm viii.4.
5. Cf. Locksley Hall, line 181. “Forward” had been the young man’s watchword for progress into the future, a progress associated with railway journeys. Now his grandson’s railway journey has been disrupted by the vandalism of “a vicious boy” (line 215), an embodiment of the underprivileged classes of modern industrial society who may wreck the progress that Science seemed to promise.
There the master scrimps his haggard sempstress of her daily bread,
There a single sordid attic holds the living and the dead.

There the smoldering fire of fever creeps across the rotted floor,
And the crowded couch of incest in the warrens of the poor.

Nay, your pardon, cry your “Forward,” yours are hope and youth, but I—
Eighty winters leave the dog too lame to follow with the cry,
Lame and old, and past his time, and passing now into the night;
Yet I would the rising race were half as eager for the light.

Light the fading gleam of even? light the glimmer of the dawn?
Aged eyes may take the growing glimmer for the gleam withdrawn.

Far away beyond her myriad coming changes earth will be
Something other than the wildest modern guess of you and me.

Earth may reach her earthly-worst, of it she gain her earthly-best,
Would she find her human offspring this ideal man at rest?

Forward then, but still remember how the course of Time will swerve,
Crook and turn upon itself in many a backward streaming curve.

Not the Hall tonight, my grandson! Death and Silence hold their own.
Leave the master6 in the first dark hour of his last sleep alone.

Worthier soul was he than I am, sound and honest, rustic Squire,
Kindly landlord, boon companion—youthful jealousy is a liar.

Cast the poison from your bosom, oust the madness from your brain.
Let the trampled serpent show you that you have not lived in vain.

Youthful! youth and age are scholars yet but in the lower school,
Nor is he the wisest man who never proved himself a fool.

Yonder lies our young sea village—Art and Grace are less and less:
Science grows and Beauty dwindles—roofs of slated hideousness!

6. Amy’s husband, the feudal-style master and squire of Locksley Hall, as contrasted with the master as capitalist employer of line 221.
There is one old hostel left us where they swing the Locksley shield,
Till the peasant cow shall butt the “lion passant” from his field.  

Poor old Heraldry, poor old History, poor old Poetry,
passing hence,
In the common deluge drowning old political common sense!

Poor old voice of eighty crying after voices that have fled!
All I loved are vanished voices, all my steps are on the dead.

All the world is ghost to me, and as the phantom disappears,
Forward far and far from here is all the hope of eighty years.

In this hostel—I remember—I repent it o’er his grave—
Like a clown—by chance he met me—I refused the hand he gave.

From that casement where the trailer mantles all the moldering bricks—
I was then in early boyhood, Edith but a child of six—

While I sheltered in this archway from a day of driving showers—
Peeped the winsome face of Edith like a flower among the flowers.

Here tonight! the Hall tomorrow, when they toll the chapel bell!
Shall I hear in one dark room a wailing, “I have loved thee well”?  

Then a peal that shakes the portal—one has come to claim his bride,
Her that shrank, and put me from her, shrieked, and started from my side—

Silent echoes! You, my Leonard, use and not abuse your day,
Move among your people, know them, follow him who led the way,

Strove for sixty widowed years to help his homelier brother men,
Served the poor, and built the cottage, raised the school, and drained the fen.

Hears he now the voice that wronged him? who shall swear it cannot be?

Earth would never touch her worst, were one in fifty such as he.

7. In heraldry “field” refers to the entire surface of the shield on which the coat-of-arms was painted. The Locksley shield, featuring a running lion (“lion passant”), appears on the signboard outside the old inn. On the “peasant cow” see lines 95–99 and 118.
8. Amy’s husband.
Ere she gain her heavenly-best, a God must mingle with game. Nay, there may be those about us whom we neither see nor name,

Felt within us as ourselves, the Powers of Good, the Powers of Ill, Stowing balm, or shedding poison in the fountains of the will.

Follow you the star that lights a desert pathway, yours or mine. Forward, till you see the Highest Human Nature is divine.

Follow Light, and do the Right—for man can half-control his doom—Till you find the deathless Angel seated in the vacant tomb.9

Forward, let the stormy moment fly and mingle with the past. I that loathed have come to love him. Love will conquer at the last.

Gone at eighty, mine own age, and I and you will bear the pall; Then I leave thee lord and master, latest lord of Locksley Hall.

\[1886\]

By an Evolutionist

The Lord let the house of a brute to the soul of a man, And the man said, “Am I your debtor?” And the Lord—“Not yet: but make it as clean as you can, And then I will let you a better.”

5 If my body come from brutes, my soul uncertain, or a fable, Why not bask amid the senses while the sun of morning shines, I, the finer brute rejoicing in my hounds, and in my stable, Youth and health, and birth and wealth, and choice of women and of wines?

2 What has thou done for me, grim Old Age, save breaking my bones on the rack? Would I had passed in the morning that looks so bright from afar!

OLD AGE
Done for thee? starved the wild beast that was linked with thee eighty years back. Less weight now for the ladder-of-heaven that hangs on a star.

If my body come from brutes, though somewhat finer than their own,
I am heir, and this my kingdom. Shall the royal voice be mute?
No, but if the rebel subject seek to drag me from the throne,
Hold the scepter, Human Soul, and rule thy province of the brute.

I have climbed to the snows of Age, and I gaze at a field in the Past,
Where I sank with the body at times in the sloughs of a low desire,
But I hear no yelp of the beast, and the Man is quiet at last
As he stands on the heights of his life with a glimpse of a height that is higher.

June Bracken and Heather

TO ———

There on the top of the down,
The wild heather round me and over me June’s high blue,
When I looked at the bracken so bright and the heather so brown,
I thought to myself I would offer this book to you,
This, and my love together,
To you that are seventy-seven,
With a faith as clear as the heights of the June-blue heaven,
And a fancy as summer-new
As the green of the bracken amid the gloom of the heather.

From Idylls of the King

Dedication

These to His Memory—since he held them dear,
Perchance as finding there unconsciously
Some image of himself—I dedicate,
I dedicate, I consecrate with tears—
These Idylls.

And indeed he seems to me
Scarce other than my king’s ideal knight,
“Who reverenced his conscience as his king;
Whose glory was, redressing human wrong;
Who spake no slander, no, nor listened to it;
Who loved one only and who clave to her—

Her—over all whose realms to their last isle, Commingled with the gloom of imminent war, The shadow of his loss drew like eclipse, Darkening the world. We have lost him; he is gone.  

We know him now; all narrow jealousies Are silent, and we see him as he moved, How modest, kindly, all-accomplished, wise, With what sublime repression of himself, And in what limits, and how tenderly;

Not swaying to this faction or to that; Not making his high place the lawless perch Of winged ambitions, nor a vantage-ground For pleasure; but through all this tract of years Wearing the white flower of a blameless life, 

Before a thousand peering littlenesses, In that fierce light which beats upon a throne, And blackens every blot: for where is he, Who dares foreshadow for an only son A lovelier life, a more unstained, than his? 

Or how should England dreaming of his sons Hope more for these than some inheritance Of such a life, a heart, a mind as thine, Thou noble Father of her Kings to be, Laborious for her people and her poor— Voice in the rich dawn of an ampler day— Far-sighted summoner of War and Waste To fruitful strifes and rivalries of peace— Sweet nature gilded by the gracious gleam Of letters, dear to Science, dear to Art, Dear to thy land and ours, a Prince indeed, Beyond all titles, and a household name, Hereafter, through all times, Albert the Good.

Break not, O woman’s-heart, but still endure; Break not, for thou art Royal, but endure, Remembering all the beauty of that star Which shone so close beside Thee that ye made One light together, but has passed and leaves The Crown a lonely splendor. 

May all love, His love, unseen but felt, o’ershadow thee, The love of all thy sons encompass thee, The love of all thy daughters cherish thee, The love of all thy people comfort thee, Till God’s love set thee at his side again!

1862

2. A paraphrase of King Arthur’s words (Idylls XI.472) summarizing the ideals of the knights of the Round Table.
3. Albert was a native of Saxe-Coburg in Germany.
A Dedication

Dear, near and true—no truer Time himself
Can prove you, though he make you evermore
Dearer and nearer, as the rapid of life
Shoots to the fall—take this and pray that he
Who wrote it, honoring your sweet faith in him,
May trust himself; and after praise and scorn,
As one who feels the immeasurable world,
Attain the wise indifference of the wise;
And after Autumn past—if left to pass
His autumn into seeming-leafless days—
Draw toward the long frost and longest night
Wearing his wisdom lightly, like the fruit
Which in our winter woodland looks a flower.

1864

I Stood on a Tower

I stood on a tower in the wet,
And New Year and Old Year met,
And winds were roaring and blowing;
And I said, “O years, that meet in tears,
Have ye aught that is worth the knowing?
Science enough and exploring,
Wanderers coming and going,
Matter enough for deploring,
But aught that is worth the knowing?”
Seas at my feet were flowing,
Waves on the shingle pouring,
Old Year roaring and blowing,
And New Year blowing and roaring.

1865

The Silent Voices

When the dumb Hour, clothed in black,
Brings the Dreams about my bed,
Call me not so often back,
Silent Voices of the dead,
Toward the lowland ways behind me,
And the sunlight that is gone!
Call me rather, silent voices,
Forward to the starry track
Glimmering up the heights beyond me
On, and always on!

1892

1. To the poet’s wife, Emily.
St. Agnes’ Eve

Deep on the convent roof the snows
Are sparkling to the moon;
My breath to heaven like vapor goes;
May my soul follow soon!
The shadows of the convent towers
Slant down the snowy sward,
Still creeping with the creeping hours
That lead me to my Lord.
Make Thou my spirit pure and clear
As are the frosty skies,
Or this first snowdrop of the year
That in my bosom lies.

As these white robes are soiled and dark,
To yonder shining ground;
As this pale taper’s earthly spark,
To yonder argent round;
So shows my soul before the Lamb,
My spirit before Thee;
So in mine earthly house I am,
To that I hope to be.

Break up the heavens, O Lord! and far,
Through all yon starlight keen,
Draw me, thy bride, a glittering star,
In raiment white and clean.

He lifts me to the golden doors;
The flashes come and go;
All heaven bursts her starry floors,
And strows her lights below,
And deepens on and up! the gates
Roll back, and far within
For me the Heavenly Bridegroom waits,
To make me pure of sin.
The Sabbaths of Eternity,
One Sabbath deep and wide—
A light upon the shining sea—
The Bridegroom with his bride!

You Ask Me, Why, Though Ill at Ease

You ask me, why, though ill at ease,
Within this region I subsist,

---

1. The evening preceding January 21, St. Agnes’s Day, honoring the patron saint of virgins. According to a legend (which Keats also used), a young girl might have a vision of her future bridegroom if she performed certain rituals on this wintry evening. As Tennyson said, “Here the legend is told by a nun,” and the “Heavenly Bridegroom” is Christ.

1. Written at the time of the disturbances during and after the passing of the Reform Bill of 1832.
Whose spirits falter in the mist,
And languish for the purple seas.

5 It is the land that freemen till,
That sober-suited Freedom chose,
The land, where girt with friends or foes
A man may speak the thing he will;

A land of settled government,
A land of just and old renown,
Where Freedom slowly broadens down
From precedent to precedent;

Where faction seldom gathers head,
But, by degrees to fullness wrought,
The strength of some diffusive thought
Hath time and space to work and spread.

Should banded unions² persecute
Opinion, and induce a time
When single thought is civil crime,
And individual freedom mute,

Though power should make from land to land
The name of Britain trebly great—
Though every channel of the State
Should fill and choke with golden sand—

25 Yet waft me from the harbor-mouth,
Wild wind! I seek a warmer sky,
And I will see before I die
The palms and temples of the South.

1833 1842

Lines

Here³ often, when a child I lay reclined,
I took delight in this locality.
Here stood the infant Ilion of the mind,
And here the Grecian ships did seem to be.
The drain-cut levels of the marshy lea—
Gray sea banks and pale sunsets—dreary wind,
Dim shores, dense rains, and heavy-clouded sea!

1833 1850

2. Any organized political groups, not necessarily trade unions.
3. At Mablethorpe, on the Lincolnshire coast.
Sonnet

How thought you that this thing could captivate?
What are those graces that could make her dear,
Who is not worth the notice of a sneer
To rouse the vapid devil of her hate?

A speech conventional, so void of weight
That after it has buzzed about one’s ear,
’Twere rich refreshment for a week to hear
The dentist babble or the barber prate;

A hand displayed with many a little art;
An eye that glances on her neighbor’s dress;
A foot too often shown for my regard;
An angel’s form—a waiting-woman’s heart;
A perfect-featured face, expressionless,
Insipid, as the Queen upon a card.

Move Eastward, Happy Earth

Move eastward, happy earth, and leave
Yon orange sunset waning slow;
From fringes of the faded eve,
O happy planet, eastward go,

Till over thy dark shoulder glow
Thy silver sister-world, and rise
To glass herself in dewy eyes
That watch me from the glen below.

Ah, bear me with thee, smoothly borne,
Dip forward under starry light,
And move me to my marriage morn,
And round again to happy night.

The Revenge

At Flores in the Azores Sir Richard Grenville lay,
And a pinnace, like a fluttered bird, came flying from far away:

1. Perhaps inspired by Tennyson’s disillusioned feelings toward Rosa Baring, a beautiful girl of high social station in Somersby, for whom he had a short-lived infatuation.
2. Female servant’s.
3. The planet Venus, or perhaps the moon, which will be reflected in the eyes of the speaker’s beloved.
4. Based on Sir Walter Raleigh’s account of an engagement in 1591 off the coast of Flores, one of the islands of the Azores, in which five Spanish ships were sunk by the Revenge during a fifteen-hour battle.
“Spanish ships of war at sea! we have sighted fifty-three!”
Then sware Lord Thomas Howard: “’Fore God I am no coward;
But I cannot meet them here, for my ships are out of gear,
And the half my men are sick. I must fly, but follow quick.
We are six ships of the line; can we fight with fifty-three?”

Then spake Sir Richard Grenville: “I know you are no coward;
You fly them for a moment to fight with them again.
But I’ve ninety men and more that are lying sick ashore.
I should count myself the coward if I left them, my Lord Howard,
To these Inquisition dogs and the devildoms of Spain.”

So Lord Howard passed away with five ships of war that day,
Till he melted like a cloud in the silent summer heaven;
But Sir Richard bore in hand all his sick men from the land
Very carefully and slow,
Men of Bideford in Devon,
And we laid them on the ballast down below;
For we brought them all aboard,
And they blessed him in their pain, that they were not left
to Spain,
To the thumbscrew and the stake, for the glory of the Lord.

He had only a hundred seamen to work the ship and to fight,
And he sailed away from Flores till the Spaniard came in sight,
With his huge sea-castles heaving upon the weather bow.
“Shall we fight or shall we fly?
Good Sir Richard, tell us now,
For to fight is but to die!
There’ll be little of us left by the time this sun be set.”
And Sir Richard said again: “We be all good English men.
Let us bang these dogs of Seville, the children of the devil,
For I never turned my back upon Don or devil yet.”

Sir Richard spoke and he laughed, and we roared a hurrah,
and so
The little Revenge ran on sheer into the heart of the foe,
With her hundred fighters on deck, and her ninety sick below;
For half of their fleet to the right and half to the left were seen,
And the little Revenge ran on through the long sea lane
between.

Thousands of their soldiers looked down from their decks and
laughed,
Thousands of their seamen made mock at the mad little craft
Running on and on, till delayed
By their mountain-like San Philip that, of fifteen hundred tons,
And up-shadowing high above us with her yawning tiers of guns,
Took the breath from our sails, and we stayed.
And while now the great San Philip hung above us like a cloud
Whence the thunderbolt will fall
Long and loud,
Four galleons drew away
From the Spanish fleet that day,
And two upon the larboard and two upon the starboard lay,
And the battle thunder broke from them all.

But anon the great San Philip, she bethought herself and went,
Having that within her womb that had left her ill content;
For a dozen times they came with their pikes and musqueteers,
And the rest they came aboard us, and they fought us hand to hand,
And a dozen times we shook 'em off as a dog that shakes his ears
When he leaps from the water to the land.

And the sun went down, and the stars came out far over the summer sea,
But never a moment ceased the fight of the one and the fifty-three.
Ship after ship, the whole night long, their high-built galleons came,
Ship after ship, the whole night long, with her battle thunder and flame;
Ship after ship, the whole night long, drew back with her dead and her shame.
For some were sunk and many were shattered, and so could fight us no more—
God of battles, was ever a battle like this in the world before?

For he said, “Fight on! fight on!”
Though his vessel was all but a wreck;
And it chanced that, when half of the short summer night was gone,
With a grisly wound to be dressed he had left the deck,
But a bullet struck him that was dressing it suddenly dead,
And himself he was wounded again in the side and the head,
And he said, “Fight on! fight on!”

And the night went down, and the sun smiled out far over the summer sea,
And the Spanish fleet with broken sides lay round us all in a ring;
But they dared not touch us again, for they feared that we still could sting,
So they watched what the end would be.
And we had not fought them in vain,
But in perilous plight were we,
Seeing forty of our poor hundred were slain,
And half of the rest of us maimed for life
In the crash of the cannonades and the desperate strife;
And the sick men down in the hold were most of them stark
and cold,

And the pikes were all broken or bent, and the powder was all of it
spent;
And the masts and the rigging were lying over the side;
But Sir Richard cried in his English pride:
“We have fought such a fight for a day and a night
As may never be fought again!

We have won great glory, my men!
And a day less or more
At sea or ashore,
We die—does it matter when?
Sink me the ship, Master Gunner—sink her, split her in twain!

Fall into the hands of God, not into the hands of Spain!”

And the gunner said, “Aye, aye,” but the seamen made reply:
“We have children, we have wives,
And the Lord hath spared our lives.
We will make the Spaniard promise, if we yield, to let us go;

We shall live to fight again and to strike another blow.”

And the lion there lay dying, and they yielded to the foe.

And the stately Spanish men to their flagship bore him then,
Where they laid him by the mast, old Sir Richard caught at last,
And they praised him to his face with their courtly foreign grace;

But he rose upon their decks, and he cried:
“I have fought for Queen and Faith like a valiant man and true;
I have only done my duty as a man is bound to do.
With a joyful spirit I Sir Richard Grenville die!”

And he fell upon their decks, and he died.

And they stared at the dead that had been so valiant and true,
And had holden the power and glory of Spain so cheap
That he dared her with one little ship and his English few;
Was he devil or man? He was devil for aught they knew,
But they sank his body with honor down into the deep,

And they manned the Revenge with a swarthier alien crew,
And away she sailed with her loss and longed for her own;
When a wind from the lands they had ruined awoke from sleep,
And the water began to heave and the weather to moan,
And or ever that evening ended a great gale blew,

And a wave like the wave that is raised by an earthquake grew,
Till it smote on their hulls and their sails and their masts and their
flags,
And the whole sea plunged and fell on the shot-shattered navy
of Spain,
And the little Revenge herself went down by the island crags
To be lost evermore in the main.
The Kraken

Below the thunders of the upper deep,
Far, far beneath in the abysmal sea,
His ancient, dreamless, uninvaded sleep
The Kraken sleepeth: faintest sunlights flee
About his shadowy sides; above him swell
Huge sponges of millennial growth and height;
And far away into the sickly light,
From many a wondrous grot and secret cell
Unnumbered and enormous polypi;°
Winnow with giant arms the slumbering green.
There hath he lain for ages, and will lie
Battening upon huge sea worms in his sleep,
Until the latter fire² shall heat the deep;
Then once by man and angels to be seen,
In roaring he shall rise and on the surface die.

1830

The Eagle: A Fragment

He clasps the crag with crooked hands;
Close to the sun in lonely lands,
Ringed with the azure world, he stands.

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls:
He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunderbolt he falls.

1851

From The Princess

Sweet and Low

Sweet and low, sweet and low,
Wind of the western sea,
Low, low, breathe and blow,
Wind of the western sea!
Over the rolling waters go,

1. A mythical sea beast of gigantic size.
2. Fire that would finally consume the world (Revelation 16.8–9).
1. The Princess (1847), a long narrative poem, contains interludes in which occasional songs are sung. The six songs printed here, some of which first appeared in later editions of the poem, rank among the finest of Tennyson’s lyrics, and various 19th- and 20th-century composers have set them to music.
Come from the dying moon, and blow,
   Blow him again to me;
While my little one, while my pretty one, sleeps.

Sleep and rest, sleep and rest,
   Father will come to thee soon;
Rest, rest, on mother’s breast,
   Father will come to thee soon;
Father will come to his babe in the nest,
Silver sails all out of the west
   Under the silver moon;
Sleep, my little one, sleep, my pretty one, sleep.

1849

**The Splendor Falls**

The splendor falls on castle walls
   And snowy summits old in story;
The long light shakes across the lakes,
   And the wild cataract leaps in glory.
Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,
Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.

O, hark, O, hear! how thin and clear,
   And thinner, clearer, farther going!
O, sweet and far from cliff and scar° mountainside
   The horns of Elfland faintly blowing!
Blow, let us hear the purple glens replying,
Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.

O love, they die in yon rich sky,
   They faint on hill or field or river;
Our echoes roll from soul to soul,
   And grow forever and forever.
Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,
And answer, echoes, answer, dying, dying, dying.

1850

**Ask Me No More**

Ask me no more: the moon may draw the sea;
The cloud may stoop from heaven and take the shape,
With fold to fold, of mountain or of cape;
But O too fond, when have I answered thee?
   Ask me no more.

Ask me no more: what answer should I give?
I love not hollow cheek or faded eye:
Yet, O my friend, I will not have thee die!
Ask me no more, lest I should bid thee live;
Ask me no more.

Ask me no more: thy fate and mine are sealed;
I strove against the stream and all in vain;
Let the great river take me to the main.
No more, dear love, for at a touch I yield;
Ask me no more.

Come Down, O Maid

Come down, O maid, from yonder mountain height.
What pleasure lives in height (the shepherd sang),
In height and cold, the splendor of the hills?
But cease to move so near the heavens, and cease

To glide a sunbeam by the blasted pine,
To sit a star upon the sparkling spire;
And come, for Love is of the valley, come,
For Love is of the valley, come thou down

And find him; by the happy threshold, he,
Or hand in hand with Plenty in the maize,
Or red with spirted purple of the vats,
Or foxlike in the vine; nor cares to walk

With Death and Morning on the Silver Horns,°
Nor wilt thou snare him in the white ravine,

Nor find him dropped upon the firths of ice,°
That huddling slant in furrow-cloven falls

To roll the torrent out of dusky doors.
But follow; let the torrent dance thee down
To find him in the valley; let the wild

Lean-headed eagles yelp alone, and leave
The monstrous ledges there to slope, and spill
Their thousand wreaths of dangling water-smoke,
That like a broken purpose waste in air.
So waste not thou, but come; for all the vales

Await thee; azure pillars of the hearth²
Arise to thee; the children call, and I
Thy shepherd pipe, and sweet is every sound,
Sweeter thy voice, but every sound is sweet;
Myriads of rivulets hurrying through the lawn,

The moan of doves in immemorial elms,
And murmuring of innumerable bees.

1. Written during Tennyson’s visit to the Swiss Alps in 1846, after he had seen Mount Jungfrau ("The Maiden").
2. Columns of smoke from the houses in the valley.
Flower in the Crannied Wall

Flower in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies,
I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
Little flower—but if I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and man is.

1869

Sonnet

She took the dappled partridge flecked with blood,
And in her hand the drooping pheasant bare,
And by his feet she held the woolly hare,
And like a master painting where she stood,
Looked some new goddess of an English wood.
Nor could I find an imperfection there,
Nor blame the wanton act that showed so fair—
To me whatever freak1 she plays is good.
Hers is the fairest Life that breathes with breath,
And their still plumes and azure eyelids closed
Made quiet Death so beautiful to see
That Death lent grace to Life and Life to Death
And in one image Life and Death reposed,
To make my love an Immortality.

ca. 1830 1931

From Maud

Part 1

6

*

5

Ah, what shall I be at fifty
Should Nature keep me alive,
If I find the world so bitter

1. Prank.
1. Tennyson described this experimental long
poem as a “monodrama,” in which a speaker tells
his story in a sequence of short lyrics, in varying
meters—a method that requires the reader to fill in
the events of the action on the evidence of the
speaker’s shifting emotional states. The speaker is
a young man, living alone in the country, whose
disillusionment after his father’s suicide has left
him full of a bitterness that borders on madness.
He is restored to sanity and intense happiness
when he discovers that Maud, the beautiful daugh-
ter of a local landowner, accepts his love for her.
Our selections focus on the stages of this love
affair. In the early sections he is fearful of love
itself (“And most of all would I flee from the cruel
When I am but twenty-five?
Yet, if she were not a cheat,
If Maud were all that she seemed,
And her smile were all that I dreamed,
Then the world were not so bitter
But a smile could make it sweet.

8
Perhaps the smile and tender tone
Came out of her pitying womanhood,
For am I not, am I not, here alone
So many a summer since she died,
My mother, who was so gentle and good?
Living alone in an empty house,
Here half-hid in the gleaming wood,
Where I hear the dead at midday moan,
And the shrieking rush of the wainscot mouse,
And my own sad name in corners cried,
When the shiver of dancing leaves is thrown
About its echoing chambers wide,
Till a morbid hate and horror have grown
Of a world in which I have hardly mixed,
And a morbid eating lichen fixed
On a heart half turned to stone.

10
I have played with her when a child;
She remembers it now we meet.
Ah, well, well, well, I may be beguiled
By some coquettish deceit.
Yet, if she were not a cheat,
And Maud were all that she seemed,
And her smile had all that I dreamed,
Then the world were not so bitter
But a smile could make it sweet.

8
She came to the village church,
And sat by a pillar alone;
An angel watching an urn
Wept over her, carved in stone;
And once, but once, she lifted her eyes,

Eventually he finds a fresh resolution by enlisting to fight against Russia in the Crimean War. Tennyson called the poem "a little Hamlet, the history of a morbid, poetic soul, under the blighting influence of a recklessly speculative age."
2. On a previous day he had encountered Maud and was surprised by her smiling at him.
And suddenly, sweetly, strangely blushed
To find they were met by my own;
And suddenly, sweetly, my heart beat stronger
And thicker, until I heard no longer
The snowy-banded, dilettante,
Delicate-handed priest intone;
And thought, is it pride? and mused and sighed,
“No surely, now it cannot be pride.”

11

1

O let the solid ground
Not fail beneath my feet
Before my life has found
What some have found so sweet;
Then let come what come may,
What matter if I go mad,
I shall have had my day.

2

Let the sweet heavens endure,
Not close and darken above me
Before I am quite quite sure
That there is one to love me;
Then let come what come may
To a life that has been so sad,
I shall have had my day.

12

1

Birds in the high Hall-garden
When twilight was falling,
Maud, Maud, Maud, Maud,
They were crying and calling.

2

Where was Maud? in our wood;
And I, who else, was with her,
Gathering woodland lilies,
Myriads blow together.

3

Birds in our wood\(^3\) sang
Ringing through the valleys,
Maud is here, here, here
In among the lilies.

---

3. The wood in the valley of the speaker’s small country estate. Here the “little birds” (as Tennyson called them in a note) are responding, in a sort of duet, to the caws of the rooks in the garden of Maud’s family estate.
I kissed her slender hand,
She took the kiss sedately;
Maud is not seventeen,
But she is tall and stately.

I to cry out on pride
Who have won her favor!
O Maud were sure of Heaven
If lowliness could save her.

I know the way she went
Home with her maiden posy,
For her feet have touched the meadows
And left the daisies rosy.

Birds in the high Hall-garden
Were crying and calling to her,
Where is Maud, Maud, Maud?
One is come to woo her.

Look, a horse at the door,
And little King Charley snarling.
Go back, my lord, across the moor,
You are not her darling.

Catch not my breath, O clamorous heart,
Let not my tongue be a thrall to my eye,
For I must tell her before we part,
I must tell her, or die.

I have led her home, my love, my only friend.
There is none like her, none.
And never yet so warmly ran my blood
And sweetly, on and on
Calming itself to the long-wished-for end.
Full to the banks, close on the promised good.

4. Meekness.
5. As Tennyson explained: “If you tread on the daisy [English variety], it turns up a rosy underside.”
6. Maud’s dog snarls at the aristocratic visitor who is the speaker’s rival for Maud’s hand.
7. He is about to propose to Maud, who will accept him.
None like her, none.
Just now the dry-tongued laurels' pattering talk
Seemed her light foot along the garden walk,
And shook my heart to think she comes once more.
But even then I heard her close the door;
The gates of heaven are closed, and she is gone.

There is none like her, none,
Nor will be when our summers have deceased.
O, art thou sighing for Lebanon
In the long breeze that streams to thy delicious East,
Sighing for Lebanon,
Dark cedar, though thy limbs have here increased,
Upon a pastoral slope as fair,
And looking to the South and fed
With honeyed rain and delicate air,
And haunted by the starry head
Of her whose gentle will has changed my fate,
And made my life a perfumed altar-flame;
And over whom thy darkness must have spread
With such delight as theirs of old, thy great Forefathers of the thornless garden, there
Shadowing the snow-limbed Eve from whom she came?

Here will I lie, while these long branches sway,
And you fair stars that crown a happy day
Go in and out as if at merry play,
Who am no more so all forlorn
As when it seemed far better to be born
To labor and the mattock-hardened hand
Than nursed at ease and brought to understand
A sad astrology, the boundless plan
That makes you tyrants in your iron skies,
Innumerable, pitiless, passionless eyes,
Cold fires, yet with power to burn and brand
His nothingness into man.

But now shine on, and what care I,
Who in this stormy gulf have found a pearl
The countercharm of space and hollow sky,
And do accept my madness, and would die
To save from some slight shame one simple girl?—

Would die, for sullen-seeming Death may give
More life to Love than is or ever was

8. The vast old cedar tree in Maud's garden, addressed in a fourteen-line question about its ancestry on Mount Lebanon in Syria and its ultimate ancestry in Eden (cf. Song of Solomon 5.15).
In our low world, where yet 'tis sweet to live.
Let no one ask me how it came to pass;
It seems that I am happy, that to me
A livelier emerald twinkles in the grass,
A purer sapphire melts into the sea.

7
Not die, but live a life of truest breath,
And teach true life to fight with mortal wrongs.
O, why should Love, like men in drinking songs,
Spice his fair banquet with the dust of death? ²
Make answer, Maud my bliss,
Maud made my Maud by that long loving kiss,
Life of my life, wilt thou not answer this?
“The dusky strand of Death inwoven here
With dear Love’s tie, makes Love himself more dear.”

8
Is that enchanted moan only the swell
Of the long waves that roll in yonder bay?
And hark the clock within, the silver knell
Of twelve sweet hours that passed in bridal white,
And died to live, long as my pulses play;
But now by this my love has closed her sight
And given false death³ her hand, and stolen away
To dreamful wastes where footless fancies dwell
Among the fragments of the golden day.
May nothing there her maiden grace affright!
Dear heart, I feel with thee the drowsy spell.
My bride to be, my evermore delight,
My own heart’s heart, my ownest own, farewell;
It is but for a little space I go.
And ye⁴ meanwhile far over moor and fell
Beat to the noiseless music of the night!
Has our whole earth gone nearer to the glow
Of your soft splendors that you look so bright?
I have climbed nearer out of lonely hell.
Beat, happy stars, timing with things below,
Beat with my heart more blest than heart can tell,
Blest, but for some dark undercurrent woe
That seems to draw—but it shall not be so;
Let all be well, be well.

***

2. I.e., why do we try to intensify the experience of love by linking it with death?
3. Sleep.
4. I.e., the stars.
Part 2

4

1

O that 'twere possible
After long grief and pain
To find the arms of my true love
Round me once again!

2

145 When I was wont to meet her
In the silent woody places
By the home that gave me birth,
We stood tranced in long embraces
Mixt with kisses sweeter sweeter
Than anything on earth.

150

3

A shadow flits before me,
Not thou, but like to thee:
Ah Christ, that it were possible
For one short hour to see
The souls we loved, that they might tell us
What and where they be.

4

160 It leads me forth at evening,
It lightly winds and steals
In a cold white robe before me,
When all my spirit reels
At the shouts, the leagues of lights
And the roaring of the wheels.

1855

In the Valley of Cauteretz

All along the valley, stream that flashest white,
Deepening thy voice with the deepening of the night,
All along the valley, where thy waters flow,
I walked with one I loved two and thirty years ago.

5. This excerpt was originally a separate lyric, written in 1833–34 and published in 1837. Tennyson wrote that a friend “begged me to weave a story round this poem, and so Maud came into being.” The lyric expresses the speaker’s longing for reunion with Maud, who has died by this point in the poem.
1. A valley in the French Pyrenees visited by Tennyson and Hallam in 1830 and revisited by Tennyson in 1861. Hallam himself had earlier described Cauteretz as a place of “waters in all shapes,” including “the impetuous cataract, fraying its way” and the “little blue lake whose deep, cold waters are fed eternally from neighboring glaciers” (cf. Swinburne, The Lake of Gaube). Tennyson said of this poem: “I like the little piece as well as anything I have written.”
2. Lady Tennyson’s journal reports how the noisy mountain stream affected her husband: “We had noticed the deepening of the Voice in the night.”
All along the valley, while I walked today,
The two and thirty years were a mist that rolls away;
For all along the valley, down thy rocky bed,
Thy living voice to me was as the voice of the dead,
And all along the valley, by rock and cave and tree,
The voice of the dead was a living voice to me.

From Idylls of the King

Pelleas and Ettarre

King Arthur made new knights to fill the gap
Left by the Holy Quest; and as he sat
In hall at old Caerleon, the high doors
Were softly sundered, and through these a youth,
Pelleas, and the sweet smell of the fields
Passed, and the sunshine came along with him.

“Make me thy knight, because I know, Sir King,
All that belongs to knighthood, and I love.”
Such was his cry: for having heard the King
Had let proclaim a tournament—the prize
A golden circlet and a knightly sword,
Full fain had Pelleas for his lady won
The golden circlet, for himself the sword:
And there were those who knew him near the King,
And promised for him: and Arthur made him knight.

And this new knight, Sir Pelleas of the isles—
But lately come to his inheritance,
And lord of many a barren isle was he—
Riding at noon, a day or twain before,
Across the forest called of Dean, to find
Caerleon and the King, had felt the sun
Beat like a strong knight on his helm, and reeled
Almost to falling from his horse; but saw
Near him a mound of even-sloping side,
Whereon a hundred stately beeches grew,
And here and there great hollies under them;
But for a mile all round was open space,
And fern and heath: and slowly Pelleas drew
To that dim day, then binding his good horse

de to seek the Holy Grail.
3. The ancient village in Monmouthshire, near Wales, where Arthur often held his court.
4. Very gladly.
5. Extensive tract in the river Wye region adjacent to Monmouthshire.
To a tree, cast himself down; and as he lay
At random looking over the brown earth
Through that green-glooming twilight of the grove,
It seemed to Pelleas that the fern without
Burned as a living fire of emeralds,
So that his eyes were dazzled looking at it.

Then o’er it crossed the dimness of a cloud
Floating, and once the shadow of a bird
Flying, and then a fawn; and his eyes closed.
And since he loved all maidens, but no maid
In special, half-awake he whispered, “Where?
O where? I love thee, though I know thee not.
For fair thou art and pure as Guinevere,
And I will make thee with my spear and sword
As famous—O my Queen, my Guinevere,
For I will be thine Arthur when we meet.”

Suddenly wakened with a sound of talk
And laughter at the limit of the wood,
And glancing through the hoary boles, he saw,
Strange as to some old prophet might have seemed
A vision hovering on a sea of fire,
Damsels in divers colors like the cloud
Of sunset and sunrise, and all of them
On horses, and the horses richly trapped\*
Breast-high in that bright line of bracken stood:
And all the damsels talked confusedly,
And one was pointing this way, and one that,
Because the way was lost.

And Pelleas rose,
And loosed his horse, and led him to the light,
There she that seemed the chief among them said,
“In happy time behold our pilot-star!
Youth, we are damsels-errant,7 and we ride,
Armed as ye see, to tilt against the knights
There at Caerleon, but have lost our way:
To right? to left? straight forward? back again?
Which? tell us quickly.”

Pelleas gazing thought,
“Is Guinevere herself so beautiful?”
For large her violet eyes looked, and her bloom
A rosy dawn kindled in stainless heavens,
And round her limbs, mature in womanhood;
And slender was her hand and small her shape;
And but for those large eyes, the haunts of scorn,
She might have seemed a toy to trifle with,
And pass and care no more. But while he gazed
The beauty of her flesh abashed the boy,

As though it were the beauty of her soul:
For as the base man, judging of the good,
Puts his own baseness in him by default
Of will and nature, so did Pelleas lend
All the young beauty of his own soul to hers,
Believing her; and when she spake to him,
Stammered, and could not make her a reply.
For out of the waste islands had he come,
Where saving his own sisters he had known
Scarce any but the women of his isles,
Rough wives, that laughed and screamed against
the gulls,
Makers of nets, and living from the sea.

Then with a slow smile turned the lady round
And looked upon her people; and as when
A stone is flung into some sleeping tarn.
The circle widens till it lip the marge,
Spread the slow smile through all her company.
Three knights were thereamong; and they too smiled,
Scorning him; for the lady was Ettarre,
And she was a great lady in her land.

Again she said, “O wild and of the woods,
Knowest thou not the fashion of our speech?
Or have the Heavens but given thee a fair face,
Lacking a tongue?”

“O damsel,” answered he,
“I woke from dreams; and coming out of gloom
Was dazzled by the sudden light; and crave
Pardon: but will ye to Caerleon? I
Go likewise: shall I lead you to the King?”

“Lead then,” she said; and through the woods they went.
And while they rode, the meaning in his eyes,
His tenderness of manner, and chaste awe,
His broken utterances and bashfulness,
Were all a burthen to her, and in her heart
She muttered, “I have lighted on a fool,
Raw, yet so stale!” But since her mind was bent
On hearing, after trumpet blown, her name
And title, “Queen of Beauty,” in the lists
Cried—and beholding him so strong, she thought
That peradventure he will fight for me,
And win the circlet: therefore flattered him,
Being so gracious, that he wellnigh deemed
His wish by hers was echoed; and her knights
And all her damsels too were gracious to him,
For she was a great lady.
And when they reached
Caerleon, ere they passed to lodging, she,
120 Taking his hand, “O the strong hand,” she said,
“See! look at mine! but wilt thou fight for me,  And win me this fine circlet, Pelleas,  That I may love thee?”

Then his helpless heart
Leaped, and he cried, “Ay! wilt thou if I win?”
125 “Ay, that will I,” she answered, and she laughed,
And straitly nipped the hand, and flung it from her;
Then glanced askew at those three knights of hers,
Till all her ladies laughed along with her.

“O happy world,” thought Pelleas, “all, meseems,  Are happy; I the happiest of them all.”
130 Nor slept that night for pleasure in his blood,  And green wood-ways, and eyes among the leaves;
Then being on the morrow knighted, sware  To love one only. And as he came away,

The men who met him rounded on their heels
And wondered after him, because his face
Shone like the countenance of a priest of old
Against the flame about a sacrifice
Kindled by fire from heaven: so glad was he.
140
Then Arthur made vast banquets, and strange knights
From the four winds came in: and each one sat,
Though served with choice from air, land, stream, and sea,
Oft in mid-banquet measuring with his eyes
His neighbor’s make and might: and Pelleas looked
145 Noble among the noble, for he dreamed
His lady loved him, and he knew himself
Loved of the King: and him his new-made knight
Worshipped, whose lightest whisper moved him more
Than all the ranged reasons of the world.

Then blushed and brake the morning of the jousts,
And this was called “The Tournament of Youth”:  For Arthur, loving his young knight, withheld
His older and his mightier from the lists,
That Pelleas might obtain his lady’s love,
150 According to her promise, and remain
Lord of the tourney. And Arthur had the jousts
Down in the flat field by the shore of Usk8
Holden: the gilded parapets were crowned
With faces, and the great tower filled with eyes
155 Up to the summit, and the trumpets blew.
There all day long Sir Pelleas kept the field

8. River near Caerleon.
With honor: so by that strong hand of his
The sword and golden circlet were achieved.

Then rang the shout his lady loved: the heat
Of pride and glory fired her face; her eye
Sparkled; she caught the circlet from his lance,
And there before the people crowned herself:
So for the last time she was gracious to him.

Then at Caerleon for a space—her look
Bright for all others, cloudier on her knight—
Lingered Ettarre: and seeing Pelleas droop,
Said Guinevere, “We marvel at thee much,
O damsel, wearing this unsunny face
To him who won thee glory!” And she said,
“Had ye not held your Lancelot in your bower,
My Queen, he had not won.” Whereat the Queen,
As one whose foot is bitten by an ant,
Glanced down upon her, turned and went her way.

But after, when her damsels, and herself,
And those three knights all set their faces home,
Sir Pelleas followed. She that saw him cried,
“Damsels—and yet I should be shamed to say it—
I cannot bide Sir Baby. Keep him back
Among yourselves. Would rather that we had
Some rough old knight who knew the worldly way,
Albeit grizzlier than a bear, to ride
And jest with: take him to you, keep him off,
And pamper him with papmeat, if ye will,
Old milky fables of the wolf and sheep,
Such as the wholesome mothers tell their boys.
Nay, should ye try him with a merry one
To find his mettle, good: and if he fly us,
Small matter! let him.” This her damsels heard,
And mindful of her small and cruel hand,
They, closing round him through the journey home,
Acted her hest,9 and always from her side
Restrained him with all manner of device,
So that he could not come to speech with her.
And when she gained her castle, upsprang the bridge,
Down rang the grate of iron through the groove,
And he was left alone in open field.

“These be the ways of ladies,” Pelleas thought,
“To those who love them, trials of our faith.
Yea, let her prove me to the uttermost,
For loyal to the uttermost am I.”
So made his moan; and, darkness falling, sought
A priory not far off, there lodges, but rose
With morning every day, and, moist or dry,
Full-armed upon his charger all day long.

Sat by the walls, and no one opened to him.
And this persistence turned her scorn to wrath.
Then calling her three knights, she charged them, “Out!
And drive him from the walls.” And out they came,
But Pelleas overthrew them as they dashed
Against him one by one; and these returned,
But still he kept his watch beneath the wall.

Thereon her wrath became a hate; and once,
A week beyond, while walking on the walls
With her three knights, she pointed downward, “Look,
He haunts me—I cannot breathe—besieges me;
Down! strike him! put my hate into your strokes,
And drive him from my walls.” And down they went,
And Pelleas overthrew them one by one;
And from the tower above him cried Ettarre,
“Bind him, and bring him in.”

He heard her voice;
Then let the strong hand, which had overthrown
Her minion-knights, by those he overthrew
Be bounden straight, and so they brought him in.

Then when he came before Ettarre, the sight
Of her rich beauty made him at once glance
More bondsman in his heart than in his bonds.
Yet with good cheer he spake, “Behold me, Lady,
A prisoner, and the vassal of thy will;
And if thou keep me in thy donjon here,
Content am I so that I see thy face
But once a day: for I have sworn my vows,
And thou hast given thy promise, and I know
That all these pains are trials of my faith,
And that thyself, when thou hast seen me strained
And sifted to the utmost, wilt at length
Yield me thy love and know me for thy knight.”

Then she began to rail so bitterly,
With all her damsels, he was stricken mute;
But when she mocked his vows and the great King,
Lighted on words: “For pity of thine own self,
Peace, Lady, peace: is he not thine and mine?"
“Thou fool,” she said, “I never heard his voice
But longed to break away. Unbind him now,
And thrust him out of doors; for save he be
Fool to the midmost marrow of his bones,
He will return no more.” And those, her three,
Laughed, and unbound, and thrust him from the gate.

And after this, a week beyond, again
She called them, saying, “There he watches yet,
There like a dog before his master’s door!

1. “Minion”: compliant and obsequious dependent of a ruler.
Kicked, he returns: do ye not hate him, ye? 
Ye know yourselves: how can ye bide at peace, 
Affronted with his fulsome innocence? 
Are ye but creatures of the board and bed, 
No men to strike? Fall on him all at once, 
And if ye slay him I reck not: if ye fail, 
Give ye the slave mine order to be bound, 
Bind him as heretofore, and bring him in: 
It may be ye shall slay him in his bonds.”

She spake; and at her will they couched their spears, 
Three against one: and Gawain² passing by, 
Bound upon solitary adventure, saw 
Low down beneath the shadow of those towers 
A villainy, three to one: and through his heart 
The fire of honor and all noble deeds 
Flushed, and he called, “I strike upon thy side— 
The caitiffs!” “Nay,” said Pelleas, “but forbear; 
He needs no aid who doth his lady’s will.”

So Gawain, looking at the villainy done, 
Forbore, but in his heat and eagerness 
Trembled and quivered, as the dog, withheld 
A moment from the vermin that he sees 
Before him, shivers, ere he springs and kills.

And Pelleas overthrew them, one to three; 
And they rose up, and bound, and brought him in. 
Then first her anger, leaving Pelleas, burned 
Full on her knights in many an evil name 
Of craven, weakling, and thrice-beaten hound: 
“Yet, take him, ye that scarce are fit to touch, 
Far less to bind, your victor, and thrust him out, 
And let who will release him from his bonds. 
And if he comes again”—there she brake short; 
And Pelleas answered, “Lady, for indeed 
I loved you and I deemed you beautiful, 
I cannot brook to see your beauty marred 
Through evil spite: and if ye love me not, 
I cannot bear to dream you so forsworn: I had liefer ye were worthy of my love, 
Than to be loved again of you—farewell; 
And though ye kill my hope, not yet my love, 
Vex not yourself: ye will not see me more.”

While thus he spake, she gazed upon the man 
Of princely bearing, though in bonds, and thought, 
“Why have I pushed him from me? this man loves, 
If love there be: yet him I loved not. Why? 
I deemed him fool? yea, so? or that in him 
A something—was it nobler than myself?— 
Seemed my reproach? He is not of my kind.

² A nephew of King Arthur and one of his chief knights.
He could not love me, did he know me well. 
Nay, let him go—and quickly.” And her knights 
Laughed not, but thrust him bounden out of door.

Forth sprang Gawain, and loosed him from his bonds, 
And flung them o’er the walls; and afterward, 
Shaking his hands, as from a lazar’s³ rag, 
“Faith of my body,” he said, “and art thou not—
Yea thou art he, whom late our Arthur made 
Knight of his table; yea and he that won 
The circlet? wherefore hast thou so defamed 
Thy brotherhood in me and all the rest, 
As let these caitiffs on thee work their will?”

And Pelleas answered, “O, their wills are hers 
For whom I won the circlet; and mine, hers, 
Thus to be bounden, so to see her face, 
Marred though it be with spite and mockery now, 
Other than when I found her in the woods; 
And though she hath me bounden but in spite, 
And all to flout me, when they bring me in, 
Let me be bounden, I shall see her face; 
Else must I die through mine unhappiness.”

And Gawain answered kindly though in scorn, 
“Why, let my lady bind me if she will, 
And let my lady beat me if she will: 
But an⁴ she send her delegate to thrall 
These fighting hands of mine—Christ kill me then 
But I will slice him handless by the wrist, 
And let my lady sear the stump for him, 
Howl as he may. But hold me for your friend: 
Come, ye know nothing: here I pledge my troth, 
Yea, by the honor of the Table Round, 
I will be leal⁵ to thee and work thy work, 
And tame thy jailing princess to thine hand. 
Lend me thine horse and arms, and I will say 
That I have slain thee. She will let me in 
To hear the manner of thy fight and fall; 
Then, when I come within her counsels, then 
From prime to vespers⁶ will I chant thy praise 
As provest⁷ knight and truest lover, more 
Than any have sung thee living, till she long 
To have thee back in lusty life again, 
Not to be bound, save by white bonds and warm, 
Dearer than freedom. Wherefore now thy horse 
And armor: let me go: be comforted: 
Give me three days to melt her fancy, and hope 
The third night hence will bring thee news of gold.”

3. Leper’s. 6. I.e., from dawn to sunset.
4. If. 7. Bravest or noblest.
5. Loyal.
Then Pelleas lent his horse and all his arms,
Saving the goodly sword, his prize, and took
Gawain’s, and said, “Betray me not, but help—
Art thou not he whom men call light-of-love?”
“Ay,” said Gawain, “for women be so light.”
Then bounded forward to the castle walls,
And raised a bugle hanging from his neck,
And winded it, and that so musically
That all the old echoes hidden in the wall
Rang out like hollow woods at hunting-tide.

Up ran a score of damsels to the tower;
“Avaunt,” they cried, “our lady loves thee not.”
But Gawain lifting up his vizor said,
“Gawain am I, Gawain of Arthur’s court,
And I have slain this Pelleas whom ye hate:
Behold his horse and armor. Open gates,
And I will make you merry.”

And down they ran,
Her damsels, crying to their lady, “Lo!
Pelleas is dead—he told us—he that hath
His horse and armor: will ye let him in?
He slew him! Gawain, Gawain of the court,
Sir Gawain—there he waits below the wall,
Blowing his bugle as who should say him nay.”

And so, leave given, straight on through open door
Rode Gawain, whom she greeted courteously.
“Dead, is it so?” she asked. “Ay, ay,” said he,
“And oft in dying cried upon your name.”
“Pity on him,” she answered, “a good knight,
But never let me bide one hour at peace.”
“Ay,” thought Gawain, “and you be fair enow:
But I to your dead man have given my troth,
That whom ye loathe, him will I make you love.”

So those three days, aimless about the land,
Lost in a doubt, Pelleas wandering
Waited, until the third night brought a moon
With promise of large light on woods and ways.
Hot was the night and silent; but a sound
Of Gawain ever coming, and this lay8—
Which Pelleas had heard sung before the Queen,
And seen her sadden listening—vexed his heart,
And marred his rest—“A worm within the rose.”

“A rose, but one, none other rose had I,
A rose, one rose, and this was wondrous fair,
One rose, a rose that gladdened earth and sky,

8. Lyric or ballad.
One rose, my rose, that sweetened all mine air—
I cared not for the thorns; the thorns were there.

“One rose, a rose to gather by and by,
One rose, a rose, to gather and to wear,
No rose but one—what other rose had I?
One rose, my rose; a rose that will not die,—
He dies who loves it,—if the worm be there.”

This tender rhyme, and evermore the doubt,
"Why lingers Gawain with his golden news?"
So shook him that he could not rest, but rode
Ere midnight to her walls, and bound his horse
Hard by the gates. Wide open were the gates,
And no watch kept; and in through these he passed,
And heard but his own steps, and his own heart
Beating, for nothing moved but his own self,
And his own shadow. Then he crossed the court,
And spied not any light in hall or bower,
But saw the postern portal also wide
Yawning, and up a slope of garden, all
Of roses white and red, and brambles mixed
And overgrowing them, went on, and found,
Here too, all hushed below the mellow moon,
Save that one rivulet from a tiny cave
Came lightening downward, and so spilled itself
Among the roses, and was lost again.
Then was he ware of three pavilions reared
Above the bushes, gilden-peaked: in one,
Red after revel, droned her lurdane9 knights
Slumbering, and their three squires across
their feet:
In one, their malice on the placid lip
Frozen by sweet sleep, four of her damsels lay:
And in the third, the circle of the jousts
Bound on her brow, were Gawain and Ettarre.1

Back, as a hand that pushes through the leaf
To find a nest and feels a snake, he drew:
Back, as a coward slinks from what he fears
To cope with, or a traitor proven, or hound
Beaten, did Pelleas in an utter shame
Creep with his shadow through the court again,
Fingering at his sword-handle until he stood
There on the castle-bridge once more, and thought,
"I will go back, and slay them where they lie."
And so went back, and seeing them yet in sleep

9. Heavy and stupid.
1. Cf. Malory, Morte Darthur 4.23: "And then it was in the month of May that she and sir Gawaine went out of the castle and supped in a pavilion, and there was a bed made, and there sir Gawaine and the lady Ettarre went to bed together; and in another pavilion she laid her damsels; and in the third pavilion laid part of her knights: for then she had no dread nor fear of sir Pelles. And there sir Gawaine lay with her, doing his pleasure in that pavilion, two days and two nights, against the faithful promise that he made to sir Pelles."
Said, “Ye, that so dishallow the holy sleep,
Your sleep is death,” and drew the sword, and thought,
“What! slay a sleeping knight? the King hath bound
And sworn me to this brotherhood”; again,
“Alas that ever a knight should be so false.”
Then turned, and so returned, and groaning laid
The naked sword athwart their naked throats,
There left it, and them sleeping; and she lay,
The circlet of the tourney round her brows,
And the sword of the tourney across her throat.

And forth he passed, and mounting on his horse
Stared at her towers that, larger than themselves
In their own darkness, thronged into the moon.
Then crushed the saddle with his thighs, and clenched
His hands, and maddened with himself and moaned:

“Would they have risen against me in their blood
At the last day? I might have answered them
Even before high God. O towers so strong,
Huge, solid, would that even while I gaze
The crack of earthquake shivering to your base
Split you, and Hell burst up your harlot roofs
Bellowing, and charred you through and through within,
Black as the harlot’s heart—hollow as a skull!
Let the fierce east scream through your eyelet-holes,
And whirl the dust of harlots round and round
In dung and nettles! hiss, snake—I saw him there—
Let the fox bark, let the wolf yell. Who yells
Here in the still sweet summer night, but I—
I, the poor Pelleas whom she called her fool?
Fool, beast—he, she, or I? myself most fool;
Beast too, as lacking human wit—disgraced,
Dishonored all for trial of true love—
Love?—we be all alike: only the King
Hath made us fools and liars. O noble vows!
O great and sane and simple race of brutes
That own2 no lust because they have no law!
For why should I have loved her to my shame?
I loathe her, as I loved her to my shame.

I never loved her, I but lusted for her—

Away—”

He dashed the rowel into his horse,
And bounded forth and vanished through the night.

Then she, that felt the cold touch on her throat,
Awaking knew the sword, and turned herself
To Gawain: “Liar, for thou hast not slain
This Pelleas! here he stood, and might have slain

2. Acknowledge.
Me and thyself.” And he that tells the tale
Says that her ever-veering fancy turned
To Pelleas, as the one true knight on earth,
And only lover; and through her love her life
Wasted and pined, desiring him in vain.

But he by wild and way, for half the night,
And over hard and soft, striking the sod
From out the soft, the spark from off the hard,
Rode till the star above the wakening sun,
Beside that tower where Percivale was cowled,3
Glanced from the rosy forehead of the dawn.
For so the words were flashed into his heart
He knew not whence or wherefore: “O sweet star,
Pure on the virgin forehead of the dawn!”
And there he would have wept, but felt his eyes
Harder and drier than a fountain bed
In summer: thither came the village girls
And lingered talking, and they come no more
Till the sweet heavens have filled it from the heights
Again with living waters in the change
Of seasons: hard his eyes; harder his heart
Seemed; but so weary were his limbs, that he,
Gasping, “Of Arthur’s hall am I, but here,
Here let me rest and die,” cast himself down,
And gulfed his griefs in inmost sleep; so lay,
Till shaken by a dream, that Gawain fired
The hall of Merlin, and the morning star
Reeled in the smoke, brake into flame, and fell.

He woke, and being ware of someone nigh,
Sent hands upon him, as to tear him, crying,
“False! and I held thee pure as Guinevere.”

But Percivale stood near him and replied,
“Am I but false as Guinevere is pure?
Or art thou mazed with dreams? or being one
Of our free-spoken Table hast not heard
That Lancelot”—there he checked himself and paused.

Then fared it with Sir Pelleas as with one
Who gets a wound in battle, and the sword
That made it plunges through the wound again,
And pricks it deeper: and he shrank and wailed,
“Is the Queen false?” and Percivale was mute.
“Have any of our Round Table held their vows?”
And Percivale made answer not a word.
“Is the King true?” “The King!” said Percivale,
“Why then let man couple at once with wolves.
What! art thou mad?”

3. Percivale, one of the most devout of Arthur’s knights, had left the Round Table to become a monk.
But Pelleas, leaping up,
Ran through the doors and vaulted on his horse
And fled: small pity upon his horse had he,
Or on himself, or any, and when he met
A cripple, one that held a hand for alms—
Hunched as he was, and like an old dwarf-elm
That turns its back on the salt blast, the boy
Paused not, but overrode him, shouting, “False,
And false with Gawain!” and so left him bruised
And battered, and fled on, and hill and wood
Went ever streaming by him till the gloom,
That follows on the turning of the world,
Darkened the common path: he twitched the reins,
And made his beast that better knew it, swerve
Now off it and now on; but when he saw
High up in heaven the hall that Merlin built,
Blackening against the dead-green stripes of even,
“Black nest of rats,” he groaned, “ye build too high.”

Not long thereafter from the city gates
Issued Sir Lancelot riding airily,
Warm with a gracious parting from the Queen,
Peace at his heart, and gazing at a star
Across the silent seeded meadow-grass
Borne, clashed: and Lancelot, saying, “What name hast thou
That ridest here so blindly and so hard?”
“No name, no name,” he shouted, “a scourge am I
To lash the treasons of the Table Round.”
“Yea, but thy name?” “I have many names,” he cried:
“I am wrath and shame and hate and evil fame,
And like a poisonous wind I pass to blast
And blaze the crime of Lancelot and the Queen.”
“First over me,” said Lancelot, “shalt thou pass.”
“Fight therefore,” yelled the youth, and either knight
Drew back a space, and when they closed, at once
The weary steed of Pelleas floundering flung
His rider, who called out from the dark field,
“Thou art false as Hell: slay me: I have no sword.”
Then Lancelot, “Yea, between thy lips—and sharp;
But here will I disedge it by thy death.”
“Slay then,” he shrieked, “my will is to be slain,”
And Lancelot, with his heel upon the fallen,
Rolling his eyes, a moment stood, then spake:
“Rise, weakling: I am Lancelot; say thy say.”
And Lancelot slowly rode his warhorse back
To Camelot, and Sir Pelleas in brief while
Caught his unbroken limbs from the dark field,
And followed to the city. It chanced that both
Brake into hall together, worn and pale.
There with her knights and dames was Guinevere.

4. I.e., blunt your sharp tongue.
Full wonderingly she gazed on Lancelot
So soon returned, and then on Pelleas, him
Who had not greeted her, but cast himself
Down on a bench, hard-breathing. “Have ye fought?”
She asked of Lancelot. “Ay, my Queen,” he said.
“And thou hast overthrown him?” “Ay, my Queen.”
Then she, turning to Pelleas, “O young knight,
Hath the great heart of knighthood in thee failed
So far thou canst not ride, unfrowardly,
A fall from him?” Then, for he answered not,
“Or hast thou other griefs? If I, the Queen,
May help them, loose thy tongue, and let me know.”
But Pelleas lifted up an eye so fierce
She quailed; and he, hissing “I have no sword,”
Sprang from the door into the dark. The Queen
Looked hard upon her lover, he on her;
And each foresaw the dolorous day to be:
And all talk died, as in a grove all song
Beneath the shadow of some bird of prey;
Then a long silence came upon the hall,
And Modred thought, “The time is hard at hand.”

The Passing of Arthur

That story which the bold Sir Bedivere,
First made and latest left of all the knights,
Told, when the man was no more than a voice
In the white winter of his age, to those
With whom he dwelt, new faces, other minds.

For on their march to westward, Bedivere,
Who slowly paced among the slumbering host,
Heard in his tent the moanings of the King:

“I found Him in the shining of the stars,
I marked Him in the flowering of His fields,
But in His ways with men I find Him not.
I waged His wars, and now I pass and die.
O me! for why is all around us here
As if some lesser god had made the world,
But had not force to shape it as he would,

5. Malory’s version ends differently. His Pelleas is rescued from despair by a damsel of the lake who, by enchantment, contrives a punishment for the haughty Ettarre. “So the lady Ettarre died for sorrow, and the damsel of the lake rejoiced sir Pelles, and loved together during their lives.” Tennyson’s Pelleas, as we learn in The Last Tournament (the idyll following Pelleas and Ettarre), is so disillusioned by the corruptions he has discovered that he establishes a mock court of his own where his followers indulge in drunken revelry. Through a messenger he reports to Arthur: “Tell thou the King . . . / My tower is full of harlots, like his court, / But mine are worthier, seeing they profess / To be none other than themselves.”
6. Arthur’s nephew, who leads the forces that revolt against the king.
Till the High God behold it from beyond,
And enter it, and make it beautiful?
Or else as if the world were wholly fair,
But that these eyes of men are dense and dim,
And have not power to see it as it is:
Perchance, because we see not to the close;—
For I, being simple, thought to work His will,
And have but stricken with the sword in vain;
And all whereon I leaned in wife and friend
Is traitor to my peace, and all my realm
Reels back into the beast, and is no more.
My God, thou hast forgotten me in my death:
Nay—God my Christ—I pass but shall not die.”

Then, ere that last weird battle in the west,
There came on Arthur sleeping, Gawain killed
In Lancelot’s war, the ghost of Gawain blown
Along a wandering wind, and past his ear
Went shrilling. “Hollow, hollow all delight!
Hail, King! tomorrow thou shalt pass away.
Farewell! there is an isle of rest for thee.
And I am blown along a wandering wind,
And hollow, hollow, hollow all delight.”
And fainter onward, like wild birds that change
Their season in the night and wail their way
From cloud to cloud, down the long wind the dream
Shrilled; but in going mingled with dim cries
Far in the moonlit haze among the hills,
As of some lonely city sacked by night,
When all is lost, and wife and child with wail
Pass to new lords; and Arthur woke and called,
“Who spake? A dream. O light upon the wind,
Thine, Gawain, was the voice—are these dim cries
Thine? or doth all that haunts the waste and wild
Mourn, or doth all that haunts the waste and wild
Mourn, knowing it will go along with me?”

This heard the bold Sir Bedivere and spake:
“O me, my King, let pass whatever will,
Elves, and the harmless glamor of the field;
But in their stead thy name and glory cling
To all high places like a golden cloud
Forever: but as yet thou shalt not pass.
Light was Gawain in life, and light in death
Is Gawain, for the ghost is as the man;
And care not thou for dreams from him, but rise—
I hear the steps of Modred in the west,
And with him many of thy people, and knights
Once thine, whom thou hast loved, but grosser grown
Than heathen, spitting at their vows and thee.
Right well in heart they know thee for the King.
Arise, go forth and conquer as of old.”
Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:

“Far other is this battle in the west
Whereunto we move, than when we strove in youth,
And brake the petty kings, and fought with Rome,
Or thrust the heathen from the Roman wall,
And shook him through the north. Ill doom is mine
To war against my people and my knights.
The king who fights his people fights himself.
And they thy knights, who loved me once, the stroke
That strikes them dead is as my death to me.

Yet let us hence, and find or feel a way
Through this blind haze, which ever since I saw
One lying in the dust at Almesbury,
Hath folded in the passes of the world.”

Then rose the King and moved his host by night,
And ever pushed Sir Modred, league by league,
Back to the sunset bound of Lyonnesse—
A land of old upheaven from the abyss
By fire, to sink into the abyss again;
Where fragments of forgotten peoples dwelled,
And the long mountains ended in a coast
Of ever-shifting sand, and far away
The phantom circle of a moaning sea.
There the pursuer could pursue no more,
And he that fled no further fly the King;
And there, that day when the great light of heaven
Burned at his lowest in the rolling year,
On the waste sand by the waste sea they closed.
Nor ever yet had Arthur fought a fight
Like this last, dim, weird battle of the west.

A deathwhite mist slept over sand and sea:
Whereof the chill, to him who breathed it, drew
Down with his blood, till all his heart was cold
With formless fear; and even on Arthur fell
Confusion, since he saw not whom he fought.

For friend and foe were shadows in the mist,
And friend slew friend not knowing whom he slew;
And some had visions out of golden youth,
And some beheld the faces of old ghosts
Look in upon the battle; and in the mist
Was many a noble deed, many a base,
And chance and craft and strength in single fights,
And ever and anon with host to host
Shocks, and the splintering spear, the hard mail hewn,
Shield-breakings, and the clash of brands, the crash
Of battleaxes on shattered helms, and shrieks
After the Christ, of those who falling down
Looked up for heaven, and only saw the mist;
And shouts of heathen and the traitor knights,
Oaths, insult, filth, and monstrous blasphemies,
Sweat, writhings, anguish, laboring of the lungs
In that close mist, and cryings for the light,  
Moans of the dying, and voices of the dead.

Last, as by some one deathbed after wail  
Of suffering, silence follows, or through death  
Or deathlike swoon, thus over all that shore,  
Save for some whisper of the seething seas,  
A dead hush fell; but when the dolorous day  
Grew drearier toward twilight falling, came  
A bitter wind, clear from the North, and blew  
The mist aside, and with that wind the tide  
Rose, and the pale King glanced across the field  
Of battle: but no man was moving there;  
Nor any cry of Christian heard thereon,  
Nor yet of heathen; only the wan wave  
Brake in among dead faces, to and fro  
Swaying the helpless hands, and up and down  
Tumbling the hollow helmets of the fallen,  
And shivered brands that once had fought with Rome,  
And rolling far along the gloomy shores  
The voice of days of old and days to be.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere,  
And whiter than the mist that all day long  
Had held the field of battle was the King:  
“Hearest thou this great voice that shakes the world,  
And wastes the narrow realm whereon we move,  
And beats upon the faces of the dead,  
My dead, as though they had not died for me?—  
O Bedivere, for on my heart hath fallen  
Confusion, till I know not what I am,  
Nor whence I am, nor whether I be King.  
Behold, I seem but King among the dead.”

Then spake the bold Sir Bedivere: “My King,  
King everywhere! and so the dead have kings,  
There also will I worship thee as King.  
Yet still thy life is whole, and still I live  
Who love thee; but who hates thee, he that brought  
The heathen back among us, yonder stands,  
Modred, unharmed, the traitor of thine house.”

Then spake the King: “My house hath been my doom.  
But call not thou this traitor of my house  
Who hath but dwelled beneath one roof with me.  
My house are rather they who sware my vows,  
Yea, even while they brake them, owned me King.  
And well for thee, saying in my dark hour,  
When all the purport of my throne hath failed,  
That quick or dead thou holdest me for King.  
King am I, whatsoever be their cry;
And one last act of kinghood shalt thou see
Yet, ere I pass.” And uttering this the King
Made at the man: then Modred smote his liege
Hard on that helm which many a heathen sword
Had beaten thin; while Arthur at one blow,
Striking the last stroke with Excalibur,
Slew him, and all but slain himself, he fell.

So all day long the noise of battle rolled
Among the mountains by the winter sea;
Until King Arthur’s Table, man by man,
Had fallen in Lyonesse about their lord,
King Arthur. Then, because his wound was deep,
The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him,
And bore him to a chapel nigh the field,
A broken chancel with a broken cross,
That stood on a dark strait of barren land:
On one side lay the Ocean, and on one
Lay a great water, and the moon was full.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
“The sequel of today unsolders all
The goodliest fellowship of famous knights
Whereof this world holds record. Such a sleep
They sleep—the men I loved. I think that we
Shall never more, at any future time,
Delight our souls with talk of knightly deeds,
Walking about the gardens and the halls
Of Camelot, as in the days that were.
I perish by this people which I made,
Though Merlin sware that I should come again
To rule once more; but, let what will be, be,
I am so deeply smitten through the helm
That without help I cannot last til morn.
Thou therefore take my brand Excalibur,
Which was my pride: for thou rememberest how
In those old days, one summer noon, an arm
Rose up from out the bosom of the lake,
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
Holding the sword—and how I rowed across
And took it, and have worn it, like a king;
And, wheresoever I am sung or told
In aftertime, this also shall be known:
But now delay not: take Excalibur,
And fling him far into the middle mere:
Watch what thou seëst, and lightly bring me word.”

To him replied the bold Sir Bedivere:
“It is not meet, Sir King, to leave thee thus,
Aidless, alone, and smitten through the helm—
A little thing may harm a wounded man;
Yet I thy hest will all perform at full,
Watch what I see, and lightly bring thee word.”
So saying, from the ruined shrine he stepped,  
And in the moon athwart the place of tombs,  
Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men,  
Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang  
Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam. He, stepping down  
By zigzag paths, and juts of pointed rock,  
Came on the shining levels of the lake.

There drew he forth the brand Excalibur,  
And o’er him, drawing it, the winter moon,  
Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth  
And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt:  
For all the haft twinkled with diamond sparks,  
Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth-work  
Of subtlest jewelry. He gazed so long  
That both his eyes were dazzled as he stood,  
This way and that dividing the swift mind,  
In act to throw: but at the last it seemed  
Better to leave Excalibur concealed  
There in the many-knotted waterflags,  
That whistled stiff and dry about the marge.  
So strode he back slow to the wounded King.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:  
“Hast thou performed my mission which I gave?  
What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?”

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:  
“I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,  
And the wild water lapping on the crag.”

To whom replied King Arthur, faint and pale:  
“Thou hast betrayed thy nature and thy name.  
Not rendering true answer, as beseemed  
Thy fealty, nor like a noble knight:  
For surer sign had followed, either hand,  
Or voice, or else a motion of the mere.  
This is a shameful thing for men to lie.  
Yet now, I charge thee, quickly go again,  
As thou art lief and dear, and do the thing  
I bade thee, watch, and lightly bring me word.”

Then went Sir Bedivere the second time  
Across the ridge, and paced beside the mere,  
Counting the dewy pebbles, fixed in thought;  
But when he saw the wonder of the hilt,  
How curiously and strangely chased, he smote  
His palms together, and he cried aloud:

“And if indeed I cast the brand away,  
Surely a precious thing, one worthy note,  
Should thus be lost forever from the earth,
Which might have pleased the eyes of many men.

What good should follow this, if this were done?
What harm, undone? Deep harm to disobey,
Seeing obedience is the bond of rule.
Were it well to obey then, if a king demand
An act unprofitable, against himself?

The King is sick, and knows not what he does.

What record, or what relic of my lord
Should be to afterward, but empty breath
And rumors of a doubt? But were this kept,
Stored in some treasure-house of mighty kings,

Some one might show it at a joust of arms,
Saying, 'King Arthur's sword, Excalibur,
Wrought by the lonely maiden of the Lake.
Nine years she wrought it, sitting in the deeps
Upon the hidden bases of the hills.'

So might some old man speak in the afterward
To all the people, winning reverence.
But now much honor and much fame were lost.'

So spake he, clouded with his own conceit,
And hid Excalibur the second time,

And so strode back slow to the wounded king.

Then spoke King Arthur, breathing heavily:
"What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?"

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
"I heard the water lapping on the crag,
And the long ripple washing in the reeds."

To whom replied King Arthur, much in wrath:
"Ah, miserable and unkind, untrue,
Unknightly, traitor-hearted! Woe is me!
Authority forgets a dying king,
Laid widowed of the power in his eye
That bowed the will. I see thee what thou art,
For thou, the latest-left of all my knights,
In whom should meet the offices of all,
Thou wouldst betray me for the precious hilt;
Either from lust of gold, or like a girl
Valuing the giddy pleasure of the eyes.
Yet, for a man may fail in duty twice,
And the third time may prosper, get thee hence:
But, if thou spare to fling Excalibur,
I will arise and slay thee with my hands."

Then quickly rose Sir .ere, and ran,
And, leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged
Among the bullrush beds, and clutched the sword,
And strongly wheeled and threw it. The great brand
Made lightnings in the splendor of the moon,
And flashing round and round and whirled in an arch,
Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,
Seen where the moving isles of winter shock
By night, with noises of the Northern Sea.
So flashed and fell the brand Excalibur:
But ere he dipped the surface, rose an arm
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
And caught him by the hilt, and brandished him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.

Then spoke King Arthur, drawing thicker breath:
“Now see I by thine eyes that this is done.
Speak out: what is it thou hast heard, or seen?”

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
“Sir King, I closed mine eyelids, lest the gems
Should blind my purpose, for I never saw,
Nor shall see, here or elsewhere, till I die,
Not though I live three lives of mortal men,
So great a miracle as yonder hilt.
Then with both hands I flung him, wheeling him;
But when I looked again, behold an arm,
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
That caught him by the hilt, and brandished him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.”

And answer made King Arthur, breathing hard:
“My end draws nigh; ’tis time that I were gone.
Make broad thy shoulders to receive my weight,
And bear me to the margin; yet I fear
My wound hath taken cold, and I shall die.”

So saying, from the pavement he half rose,
Slowly, with pain, reclining on his arm,
And looking wistfully with wide blue eyes
As in a picture. Him Sir Bedivere
Remorsefully regarded through his tears,
And would have spoken, but he found not words;
Then took with care, and kneeling on one knee,
O’er both his shoulders drew the languid hands,
And rising bore him through the place of tombs.

But, as he walked, King Arthur panted hard,
Like one that feels a nightmare on his bed
When all the house is mute. So sighed the King,
Muttering and murmuring at his ear, “Quick, quick!
I fear it is too late, and I shall die.”
But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge,
Clothed with his breath, and looking, as he walked,
Larger than human on the frozen hills.
He heard the deep behind him, and a cry
Before. His own thought drove him like a goad.
Dry clashed his harness in the icy caves
And barren chasms, and all to left and right
The bare black cliff clanged round him, as he based
His feet on just of slippery crag that rang
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armèd heels—
And on a sudden, lo! the level lake,
And the long glories of the winter moon.

Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge,
Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,
Beneath them; and descending they were ware
That all the decks were dense with stately forms,
Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream—by these
Three Queens with crowns of gold: and from them rose
A cry that shivered to the tingling stars,
And, as it were one voice, an agony
Of lamentation, like a wind that shrills
All night in a waste land, where no one comes,
Or hath come, since the making of the world.

Then murmured Arthur, “Place me in the barge.”
So to the barge they came. There those three Queens
Put forth their hands, and took the King, and wept.

But she, that rose the tallest of them all
And fairest, laid his head upon her lap,
And loosed the shattered casque, and chafed his hands,
And called him by his name, complaining loud,
And dropping bitter tears against a brow
Striped with dark blood: for all his face was white
And colorless, and like the withered moon
Smote by the fresh beam of the springing east;
And all his greaves and cuisses dashed with drops
Of onset; and the light and lustrous curls—
That made his forehead like a rising sun
High from the daïs-throne—were parched with dust;
Or, clotted into points and hanging loose,
Mixed with the knightly growth that fringed his lips.
So like a shattered column lay the King;
Not like that Arthur who, with lance in rest,
From spur to plume a star of tournament,
Shot through the lists at Camelot, and charged
Before the eyes of ladies and of kings.

Then loudly cried the bold Sir Bedivere:

“Ah! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go?
Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes?
For now I see the true old times are dead,
When every morning brought a noble chance,
And every chance brought out a noble knight.
Such times have been not since the light that led
The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.
But now the whole Round Table is dissolved
Which was an image of the mighty world,
And I, the last, go forth companionless,
And the days darken round me, and the years,
Among new men, strange faces, other minds."

And slowly answered Arthur from the barge:
“The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfills himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.
Comfort thyself: what comfort is in me?
I have lived my life, and that which I have done
May He within himself make pure! but thou,
If thou shouldst never see my face again,
Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.
But now farewell. I am going a long way
With these thou seest—if indeed I go
(For all my mind is clouded with a doubt)—
To the island-valley of Avalon;
Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly: but it lies
Deep-meadowed, happy, fair with orchard lawns
And bowery hollows crowned with summer sea,
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound.”

So said he, and the barge with oar and sail
Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan
That, fluting a wild carol ere her death,
Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood
With swarthy webs. Long stood Sir Bedivere
Revolving many memories, till the hull
Looked one black dot against the verge of dawn,
And on the mere the wailing died away.

But when that moan had passed for evermore,
The stillness of the dead world’s winter dawn
Amazed him, and he groaned, “The King is gone.”
And therewithal came on him the weird rhyme,
“From the great deep to the great deep he goes.”

Whereat he slowly turned and slowly clomb
The last hard footstep of that iron crag;
Thence marked the black hull moving yet, and cried,
“He passes to be King among the dead,
And after healing of his grievous wound
He comes again; but—if he come no more—"
O me, be yon dark Queens in yon black boat,
Who shrieked and wailed, the three whereat we gazed
On that high day, when, clothed with living light,
They stood before his throne in silence, friends
Of Arthur, who should help him at his need?"

Then from the dawn it seemed there came, but faint
As from beyond the limit of the world,
Like the last echo born of a great cry,
Sounds, as if some fair city were one voice
Around a king returning from his wars.

Thereat once more he moved about, and clomb
Even to the highest he could climb, and saw,
Straining his eyes beneath an arch of hand,
Or thought he saw, the speck that bare the King,
Down that long water opening on the deep
Somewhere far off, pass on and on, and go
From less to less and vanish into light.
And the new sun rose bringing the new year.

Northern Farmer¹

New Style

1
Dosn't thou 'ear my 'erse's² legs, as they canters awaäy?
Proputty, proputty, proputty—that's what I 'ears 'em saäy.
Proputty, proputty, proputty—Sam, thou's an ass for thy paains:
Theer's moor sense i' one o' 'is legs, nor in all thy braaïns.

5 Woä—theer's a craw⁴ to pluck wi' tha, Sam: yon's parson's 'ouse—
Dosn't thou knaw that a man mun be eäther a man or a mouse?
Time to think on it then; for thou'll be twenty to weeäk.⁵
Proputty, proputty—woä then woä—let ma 'ear mysèn speäk.

10 Me an' thy muther, Sammy, 'as beän a-talkin' o' thee;
Thou's beän talkin' to muther, an' she beän a tellin' it me.
Thou'll not marry for munny—thou's sweet upo' parson's lass—
Noä—thou'll marry for luvv—an' we boäth on us thinks tha an ass.

1. This monologue exemplifies the diversity of Tennyson’s talents. A passionate attachment to land and property, which was portrayed sympathetically by Wordsworth in Michael, is here represented humorously. The harsh common sense of the farmer’s attitude toward love and marriage is reinforced by his jaw-breaking north English dialect.

2. Horse’s.

3. Property.


5. This week.

6. Myself.
Seeäd her todaäy goä by—Saäint's-daäy—they was ringing the bells. She's a beauty thou thinks—an' soä is scoors o' gells,⁷

Them as 'as munny an 'all—wot's a beauty?—the flower as blaws. But proputty, proputty sticks, an' proputty, proputty graws.

Do'ant be stunt;⁸ taäke time; I knaws what maäkes tha sa mad. Warn't I craäzed fur the lasses mysên when I wur a lad? But I knawed a Quaaäker feller as often 'as towd⁹ ma this: “Doänt thou marry for munny, but goä wheer munny is!”

An' I went wheer munny war; an' thy muther coom to 'and, Wi' lots o' munny laaïd by, an' a nicetish bit o' land. Määbe she warn't a beauty:—I niver giv it a thowt—But warn't she as good to cuddle an' kiss as a lass as 'ant nowt?¹

Parson's lass 'ant nowt, an' she weänt 'a nowt² when 'e's deäd, Mun be a guvness,³ lad, or summut, and addle⁴ her breäd: Why? fur 'e's nobbut⁵ a curate, an' weänt niver get hissên clear, An’ e maäde the bed as 'e ligs on afoor 'e coomed to the shere.⁶

An' thin 'e coomed to the parish wi' lots o' Varsity debt, Stook to his taäil they did, an’'e 'ant got shut on 'em⁷ yet. An’ 'e ligs on 'is back i’ the grip,⁸ wi' noan to lend 'im a shuvv, Woorse nor a far-weltered yowe:⁹ fur, Sammy, 'e married fur luvv.

Luvv? what's luvv? thou can luvv thy lass an’ 'er munny too, Maakin’ 'em goä togither, as they've good right to do. Couldn' I luvv thy muther by cause o' 'er munny laaïd by? Naäy—fur I luved 'er a vast sight moor fur it: reäson why.

Ay an' thy muther says thou wants to marry the lass, Cooms of a gentleman burn;¹ an' we boäth on us think tha an ass. Woä then, proputty, wiltha?—an ass as near as mays nowt²—Woä then, wiltha? dangtha!—the bees is as fell as owt.³

Breäk me a bit o' the esh⁴ for his 'eäd, lad, out o' the fence! Gentleman burn! what's gentleman burn? is it shillins an' pence? Proputty, proputty's ivrything 'ere, an', Sammy, I'm blest If it isn't the saäme oop yonder, fur them as 'as it's the best.

7. Scores of girls.
8. Stubborn.
1. Has nothing.
2. Won't have anything.
3. Must be a governess.
4. Earn.
5. Nothing but.
7. Rid of them.
8. Ditch.
9. Ewe lying on her back.
1. Born.
3. The flies are as mean as anything.
Tis’n them as ‘as munny as breaks into ‘ouses an’ steals,
Them as ‘as coasts to their backs an’ takes their regular meals.
Noa, but it’s them as aiver knows wheer a meal’s to be ‘ad.
Taake my word for it, Sammy, the poor in a loomp is bad.

Them or thir feythers, tha sees, mun ‘a beaen a laazy lot,
Fur work mun ‘a gone to the gittin’ wheniver munny was got.
Feyther ‘ad ammost nowt; leaestways ‘is munny was ‘id.
But ‘e tued an’ moiled⁸ ‘issen dead, an’ ‘e died a good un, ‘e did.

Loök thou theer wheer Wrigglesby beck⁶ cooms out by the ’ill!
Feyther run oop⁷ to the farm, an’ I runs oop to the mill;
An’ I’ll run oop to the brig,⁸ an’ that thou’ll live to see;
And if thou marries a good un I’ll leave the land to thee.

Thim’s my noätions, Sammy, wheerby I meän to stick;
But if thou marries a bad un, I’ll leave the land to Dick.—
Coom oop, proputty, proputty—that’s what I ‘ears ‘im saäy—
Proputty, proputty, proputty—canter an’ canter awaäy.

To Virgil

Written at the Request of the Mantuans¹ for the
Nineteenth Centenary of Virgil’s Death

1
Roman Virgil, thou that singest
Ilion’s lofty temples robed in fire,
Ilion falling, Rome arising,
wars, and filial faith, and Dido’s pyre;²

2
Landscape-lover, lord of language
more than he that sang the “Works and Days,”³
All the chosen coin of fancy
flashing out from many a golden phrase;

3
Thou that singest wheat and woodland,
tilth and vineyard, hive and horse and herd;

4. A branch of ash leaves (to keep the flies off the horse’s head).
5. Toiled and drudged.
6. Brook.
7. I.e., father’s property ran up.
8. Bridge.
1. Inhabitants of Mantua, the city near Virgil’s birthplace.
2. The allusions in this stanza are to incidents in Virgil’s Aeneid, especially the fall of Troy (Ilion).
3. Hesiod, a Greek poet, whose Works and Days anticipated Virgil’s Georgics in its pictures of farm life.
All the charm of all the Muses
  often flowering in a lonely word;

  4
Poet of the happy Tityrus⁴
  piping underneath his beechen bowers;
Poet of the poet-satyris⁵
  whom the laughing shepherd bound with flowers;

  5
Chanter of the Pollio,⁶ glorying
  in the blissful years again to be,
Summers of the snakeless meadow,
  unlaborious earth and oarless sea;

  6
Thou that seest Universal
  Nature moved by Universal Mind;
Thou majestic in thy sadness
  at the doubtful doom of human kind;

  7
Light among the vanished ages;
  star that gildest yet this phantom shore;
Golden branch⁷ amid the shadows,
  kings and realms that pass to rise no more;

  8
Now thy Forum roars no longer,
  fallen every purple Caesar’s dome—
Though thine ocean-roll of rhythm
  sound forever of Imperial Rome—

  9
Now the Rome of slaves hath perished,
  and the Rome of freemen⁸ holds her place,
I, from out the Northern Island
  sundered once from all the human race,

  10
I salute thee, Mantovano,⁹
  I that loved thee since my day began,
Wielder of the stateliest measure
  ever molded by the lips of man.

1882 1882

6. A friend of Virgil’s who is celebrated in Eclogue 4.
8. Italy had only recently been liberated and unified.
“Frater Ave atque Vale”¹

Row us out from Desenzano,² to your Sirmione row!
So they rowed, and there we landed—“O venusta Sirmio!”
There to me through all the groves of olive in the summer glow,
There beneath the Roman ruin where the purple flowers grow,

Came that “Ave atque Vale” of the Poet’s hopeless woe,
Tenderest of Roman poets nineteen hundred years ago,
“Frater Ave atque Vale”—as we wandered to and fro
Gazing at the Lydian³ laughter of the Garda Lake below
Sweet Catullus’s all-but-island olive-silvery Sirmio!

The Dawn

“You are but children.”
—EGYPTIAN PRIEST TO SOLON

Red of the Dawn!
Screams of a babe in the red-hot palms of a Moloch¹ of Tyre,
Man with his brotherless dinner on man in the tropical wood,
Priests in the name of the Lord passing souls through fire to the fire,

Head-hunters and boats of Dahomey² that float upon human blood!

Red of the Dawn!
Godless fury of peoples, and Christless frolic of kings,
And the bolt of war dashing down upon cities and blazing farms,

For Babylon was a child newborn, and Rome was a babe in arms,
And London and Paris and all the rest are as yet but in leading strings.

Dawn not Day,
While scandal is mouthing a bloodless name at her cannibal feast,
And rake-ruined bodies and souls go down in a common wreck,

And the Press of a thousand cities is prized for it smells of the beast,

Or easily violates virgin Truth for a coin or a check.

Dawn not Day!
Is it Shame, so few should have climbed from the dens in the level below,
Men, with a heart and a soul, no slaves of a four-footed will?

1. “Brother, hail and farewell,” a line from an elegy by the Roman poet Catullus on the death of his brother (101.10). Tennyson himself had recently lost his brother Charles.
2. A town on Lake Garda in Italy, which Tennyson visited in 1880. “Sirmione” is a beautiful peninsula jutting into the lake, on which Catullus had his summer home. Catullus’ poem in honor of the locality includes the phrase “O venusta Sirmio!” (“O lovely Sirmio!”).
3. The Etruscans, who settled near Lake Garda, were thought to be descended from the Lydians of Asia Minor.
But if twenty million of summers are stored in the sunlight still,
We are far from the noon of man, there is time for the race to grow.

Red of the Dawn!
Is it turning a fainter red? So be it, but when shall we lay
The Ghost of the Brute that is walking and haunting us yet, and be free?
In a hundred, a thousand winters? Ah, what will our children be?
The men of a hundred thousand, a million summers away?

Crossing the Bar

Sunset and evening star,
   And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
   When I put out to sea,

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
   Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
   Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,
   And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
   When I embark;

For though from out our bourne of Time and Place
   The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
   When I have crossed the bar.